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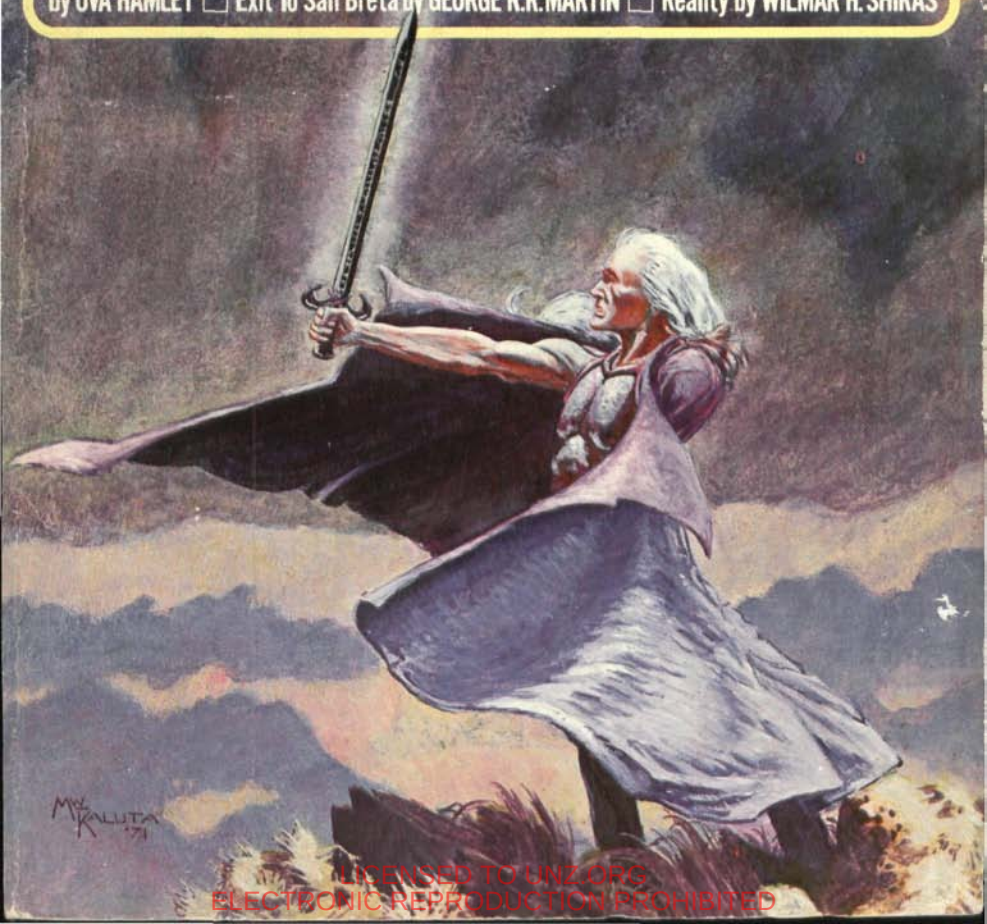

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Science Fiction & Fantasy STORIES

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03-62 230 Street, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. *Editorial office: Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364 Business office: Purchase, N.Y., Box 175, Portchester, N.Y., at 60¢ a copy Subscription rates: One year (6 issues): United States and possessions, $3.00; Canada and Pan American Union countries, $3.50; all other countries, $4.00. Change of address notices, undeliverable copies, orders for subscriptions, and other mail items are to be sent to Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364. Second Class Postage paid at Flushing, N.Y., and at additional mailing office.* *Copyright 1971 by Ultimate Publishing Co., Inc. All rights reserved Editorial contributions must be accompanied by return postage and will be handled with reasonable care, however, publisher assumes no responsibility for return or safety of art work, photographs or manuscripts.*

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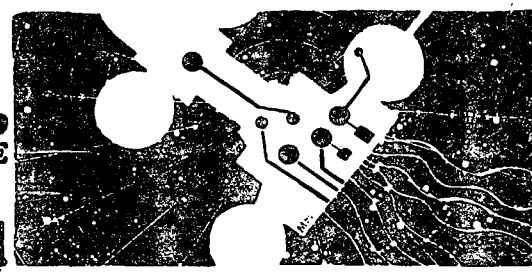
TED WHITE

editorial



This issue we forego our usual serial (with its overpowering presence in 30,000-word to 40,000-word dollops) for shorter fiction; when possible I prefer to alternate an issue of this sort with those issues containing serials. And the mix of stories this time is about as rich and varied as possible, running from the sword-and-sorcery of "The Sleeping Sorceress" to the avant-garde artistry of "Death Card," with six other stops in between. I'm also pleased to present in this issue Mike Kaluta's second cover painting for us, done especially for Moorcock's Elric novella. It seems an auspicious debut for 1972!

1972 is FANTASTIC's Twentieth Anniversary Year; the first issue of FANTASTIC was the Summer, 1952 issue. We won't be celebrating our actual 20th Anniversary until our August issue, but I'll try to make every issue of the year as memorable as possible. Starting here and now!

Among the letters in this issue's *According To You* is one from Greg Feeley, in which he remarks upon the current state of book reviewing in the professional sf magazines. He seems none too happy about it, but I wonder if he is aware of how much worse things have been in the past?

Up to about 1950, there were few if any regular book review columns in any of the many science fiction magazines then published. This was accounted for, in part, by the relatively few sf books being published, especially before the war. The post-World War Two period witnessed the launching of a half dozen or so hardcover publishing houses devoted exclusively to science fiction and fantasy. These were all set up and run by sf enthusiasts—fans and collectors who had enough money to begin extremely small-scale publishing activities. The first (and pre-war) was August Derleth's Arkham House, which specialised in fantasy and weird fiction, beginning with Lovecraft and concentrating upon the *Weird Tales* school of authors. But not long after the war came Gnome Press, Fantasy Press, FPCI, and various others whose imprints have all now passed into oblivion.

These publishers brought out books almost exclusively drawn from the pages of pre-war sf magazines, *Astounding* contributing the lion's share. Novels like van Vogt's *Slan, Weapons of Isher,* and *World of Null-A,* Heinlein's *Beyond This Horizon,* Smith's Lensmen series, Hubbard's *Fear & The Typewriter in the Sky* (both from *Unknown*); collections of short stories by Heinlein, Sturgeon, Kutner—virtually all the cream of the 1930's and 1940's magazines was eventually skimmed off into hardcover form. Very few new novels were written for book publication; it wasn't necessary and besides the magazine stories had a built-in audience of readers who wanted their favorites in a more permanent form.

(Continued on page 125)

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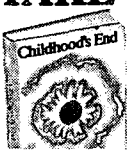

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The original Elric Stories were published in the British Science Fantasy *in the early 1960's, and collected into two books. Of them, Michael Moorcock has said that he exorcised his own demons in their writing—that they were symbolically autobiographical—and this may help to explain their power and mood, which lifted them above most contemporary sword and sorcery fiction. (Later he was to reuse them in the totally different context of his Jerry Cornelius stories.) Now Moorcock returns with a new Elric novella, in which the crimson-eyed albino finds himself in league with—*

THE SLEEPING SORCERESS

MICHAEL MOORCOCK

INTRODUCTION

FOR TEN THOUSAND years did the Bright Empire of Melniboné rule the world by virtue of her Sorcerer Kings, her Dragon Hordes and her golden battle-barges. From Imrryr, the Dreaming City, capital of the Isle of Melniboné, the power of the Bright Emperors radiated over all the lands of mankind, though the Melniboneans were not true men themselves. They were tall, with eldritch features. They were proud, malicious, sensitive and artistic with a vast knowledge of sorcery. They were familiar with many of the supernatural Realms of the Higher Worlds and knew that the wonders of Earth could not compare with those of the Higher Worlds. They regarded their late-born cousins of the Young Kingdoms with arrogant contempt, reckoning them fit only to be plundered or enslaved.

But at last, after a hundred centuries, Melniboné's power began to wane as she was shaken by the casting of frightful runes, attacked by powers even greater than she, until all that was left of the Bright Empire was the Isle itself and its single city, Imrryr, still strong, still feared, still the mercantile capital of the world, but no longer the glorious power she had been.

And so it might have remained, save that it was not Destiny's way to have it so.

For the next few centuries, which was called the Age of the Young Kingdoms, petty empires rose and fell and the new nations had their moments of power—Sheegoth, Maidahk, S'aaleem, Ilmiora and others. And then came a great movement upon the Earth and above it; the destiny of Men and Gods was hammered out upon the forge of Fate and monstrous wars were brewed and mighty deeds performed. And during this time there rose up many heroes.

Chief of these was Elric, last ruler of

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Melnibonė, who bore the rune-carved Black Sword, Stormbringer. Hero, perhaps, is not the proper term for Elric, for it was he who turned against his own line and led the Sea Lords of the Young Kingdoms in their mighty attack upon Imrryr—an attack which resulted in Imrryr's destruction and theirs. But it was all part of Fate's plan, though Elric was not to learn this for many years.

Elric of Melnibonė, proud prince of ruins, last lord of a dying race, became a wanderer, loathed and feared throughout the lands of the Young Kingdoms. Elric of the Black Sword, sorcerer and slayer of kin, despoiler of his homeland, crimson-eyed albino, who had within him a greater destiny than he knew . . .

. . . Now there was a certain sorcerer of Pan Tang called Theleb K'aarna. Elric, whose vengeful emotions had already brought much grief to himself and others, bore a grudge against the sorcerer.

After an incident concerning a citadel which sang, this sorcerer escaped Elric in Jharkor, a Western nation ruled by Queen Yishana, who loved Elric (as did Theleb K'aarna love her). Elric, presuming Theleb K'aarna's return to the island theocracy of Pan Tang, set off in chase. But in Dharijor, at the port of Gromoorva, he learned that Theleb K'aarna had taken passage aboard a merchantman bound for the port of Trepezaz in Lromyr, a nation on the Southern continent.

Moonglum, of the red hair and the wide grin and the short stature, Elric's constant companion, suggested that they forget the chase, but the Prince of Ruins would have none of that. They must go

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to Lormyr and be revenged upon the sorcerer at once . . .

—The Chronicle of the Black Sword

One

In the sky a cold moon, cloaked in clouds, sent down faint light that fell upon a sullen sea where a ship lay at anchor off an uninhabited coast.

From the ship a boat was being lowered and two figures, swathed in long capes, watched this activity while they tried to calm horses who stamped their hooves on the swaying deck and snorted and rolled their eyes.

The shorter figure was grumbling.

"Why we could not have disembarked at Trepesaz, I do not know . . ."

"Because, friend Moonglum, I wish our arrival in Lormyr to be secret. If Theleb K'aarna knew of my coming—as he would if we went to Trepesaz—then he would fly again and the chase would begin afresh."

Moonglum shrugged. "I still feel that your pursuit of that sorcerer is a surrogate activity—that you seek him because you do not wish to seek your proper destiny . . ."

Elric turned his bone-white face in the moonlight and regarded Moonglum with crimson, moody eyes. "And what of it? You need not accompany me if you do not wish to . . ."

Moonglum shrugged his shoulders again. "Aye. I know. Perhaps I stay with you for the same reasons that you pursue the sorcerer of Pan Tang." He grinned. "So that's enough of debate, eh, Lord Elric?"

"Debate achieves nothing," Elric agreed. He patted his horse's nose as seamen, clad in colourful Tarkeshite silks, came forward to take the horses and hoist them down to the waiting boat.

Struggling, the horses were lowered, then Elric and Moonglum, their bundles on their backs, swung down the ropes and jumped into the rocking craft. Sailors pushed off and began to row for the shore.

The late autumn air was cold and Moonglum shivered as he stared towards the bleak cliffs ahead. "Winter is near and I'd rather be domiciled at some friendly tavern than roaming abroad. When this business is done with the sorcerer what say we head for Jadmar or one of the other big Vilmirian cities and see what mood the warmer clime puts us in?"

But Elric did not reply. His strange eyes stared into the middle distance, but they seemed to be peering into his own soul.

Moonglum sighed and pursed his lips. He was used to his friend's sudden lapses into silence.

The sailors shipped their oars as the boat's bottom ground on shingle. The horses, smelling land, whinnied. Elric and Moonglum steadied them.

One of the sailors patted the neck of Elric's horse and did not look directly at the albino. "The captain said you would pay when we reached the Lormyrian shore, my lord."

Elric grunted and reached under his cloak. He drew out a jewel that shone brightly through the darkness of the night. The sailor gasped and reached out his hand to take it. "I have never seen so fine a gem!"

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Elric began to lead the horse into the shallows and Moonglum hastily followed him cursing under his breath.

As they mounted their horses and the boat pulled back towards the ship, Moonglum said: "That jewel was worth a hundred times the cost of our passage!"

"What of it?" Elric fitted his feet in his stirrups and guided the horse towards a part of the cliff less steep than the rest.

"I would point out," Moonglum said bitterly, "that if it was left to you, Lord Elric, we should have no means of livelihood at all. If I had not taken the precaution of retaining some of the profits made from the sale of that trireme we captured and auctioned in Dhakos, we should be paupers now."

"Aye," replied Elric carelessly, and he spurred his horse up the path that led to the top of the cliff.

Moonglum shook his head in frustration and followed on.

By dawn they were riding over the undulating landscape of small hills and valleys that made up the terrain of Lormyr's most northerly peninsula.

"Since Theleb K'aarna must needs live off rich patrons," Elric explained as they rode, "he will almost certainly go to the capital, Iosaz, where King Montan rules. He will seek service with some noble, perhaps King Montan himself."

"And how soon shall we see the capital, Lord Elric?"

"It is several days ride, Master Moonglum."

Moonglum sighed. The sky bore signs of snow and the tent that they carried was of thin silk, suitable for the hotter lands of the East and West. He thanked his gods that he wore a thick quilted jerkin beneath his breastplate and that before he had left the ship he had pulled on a pair of woollen breeks to go beneath the gaudy breeks of red silk that were his outer wear. His conical cap of fur, iron and leather had earflaps that were now drawn tightly and secured by a thong beneath his chin and his heavy deerskin cape was drawn around his shoulders.

Elric, for his part, seemed not to notice the chill weather. His own cape flapped behind him. He, too, wore breeks of deep blue silk, a high collared shirt of black silk, a steel breastplate lacquered a gleaming black, like his helmet, and embossed with patterns of delicate silverwork. Behind his saddle were deep panniers and across this was a bow and quiver of arrows. At his side swung the huge runesword Stormbringer, the source of his strength and his misery, and on his right hip was a long dirk, presented him by Queen Yishana of Jharkor.

Moonglum bore a similar bow and quiver. On each hip was a sword, one short and straight, the other long and curved, after the fashion of the men of Elwher, his homeland. Both blades were in scabbards of beautifully worked Ilmioran leather, embellished with stitches of scarlet and gold thread.

Together the pair looked, to those who had not heard of them, like free travelling mercenaries who had been more successful in their careers than most.

Their horses bore them tirelessly through the countryside. These were

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tall Shazarian steeds, known for their stamina and intelligence. After several weeks cooped up in the hold of the Tarkeshite ship they were glad to be moving again.

Now small villages—squat houses of stone and thatch—came in sight, but they were careful to avoid them.

Lormyr was one of the oldest of the Young Kingdoms and much of the world's history had been made here. Even the Melnibonéans had heard the tales of Lormyr's hero of ancient times, Aubec of Malador, who was said to have carved new lands from the stuff of Chaos that had once existed at World's Edge. But Lormyr had long since declined from her peak of power (though still a major nation of the Southwest) and had mellowed into a nation that was at once picturesque and cultured. Elric and Moonglum passed pleasant farmsteads, well-nurtured fields, orchards in which the golden-leaved trees were surrounded by time-worn, moss-grown walls. A sweet land and a peaceful land in contrast to the rawer, bustling Northwestern nations of Jharkor, Tarkesh and Dharijor which they had left behind.

Moonglum gazed around him as they slowed their horses to a trot. "Theleb K'aarna could work much mischief here, Elric. I am reminded of the peaceful hills and plains of Elwher, my own land."

Elric nodded. "Lormyr's years of turbulence ended when she cast off Melniboné's shackles and was first to proclaim herself a free nation. I have a liking for this gentle landscape. It soothes me. Now we have another reason for finding the sorcerer before he begins to stir his brew of corruption."

Moonglum smiled quietly. "Be careful, my lord, for you are once again succumbing to those soft emotions you so despise . . ."

Elric straightened his back. "Come. Let's make haste for Iosaz."

"The sooner we reach a city with a decent tavern and a warm fire, the better." Moonglum drew his cape about him.

"Then pray that the sorcerer's soul is soon sent to Limbo, Master Moonglum, for then I'll be content to sit before the fire all winter long if it suits you!" And Elric spurred his horse into a sudden gallop as grey evening closed over the tranquil hills.

Two

LORMYR WAS FAMOUS for her great rivers. It was her rivers that had helped make her rich and had kept her strong.

After three days travelling, when a light snow had begun to drift from the sky, Elric and Moonglum rode out of the hills and saw before them the foaming waters of the Schlan River, tributary of the Zaphra-Trepek which flowed from beyond Iosaz down to the sea at Trepesaz. No ships sailed the Schlan at this point, for there were rapids and huge waterfalls every few miles, but at the old town of Stagasaz, built where the Schlan joined the Zaphra-Trepek, Elric planned to send Moonglum ahead to buy a small boat in which they could sail up the Zaphra-Trepek to Iosaz where Theleb K'aarna was almost certain to be.

They followed the banks of the Schlan now, riding hard and hoping

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to reach the outskirts of the town before nightfall. They rode past fishing villages and the houses of minor nobles, they were occasionally hailed by friendly fishermen who trawled the quieter reaches of the river, but they did not stop. The fishermen were typical of the area, with ruddy features and huge, curling moustaches, dressed in heavily embroidered linen smocks and leather boots that reached almost to their thighs, men who in past times had been ever ready to lay down their nets, pick up swords and halberds and mount horses to go to the defense of their homeland.

More rapids came in sight. Great black rocks glistened in the gloom and roaring water gushed over them, sending spray high into the air. There were no houses or villages here and the paths beside the banks were narrow and treacherous so that Elric and Moonglum were forced to slow their pace and make their way with caution.

Moonglum shouted over the noise of the water: "We'll not make Stagasaz by nightfall now!"

Elric nodded. "We'll make camp below the rapids."

The snow was still falling and the wind drove it against their faces so that it became even more difficult to pick their way along the narrow track that now wound high above the river.

But at last the tumult began to die and the track widened out and the waters calmed and with relief they looked about them over the plain to find a likely camping place.

It was Moonglum who saw them first.

His finger was unsteady as he pointed into the sky towards the South.

"Elric. What make you of those?"

Elric peered up into the lowering sky, brushing snowflakes from his face.

His expression was at first puzzled. His brow furrowed and his eyes narrowed. Black shapes against the sky. Winged shapes. It was impossible at this distance to judge their scale, but they did not fly the way birds fly. Elric was reminded of another flying creature—a creature he had last seen when he and the Sealords fled burning Imrryr and the folk of Melniboné had released their vengeance upon the reavers.

That vengeance had taken two forms.

The first form had been in the golden battle-barges that had waited for the attackers as they left the ruined Dreaming City.

The second form had been in the great dragons of the Bright Empire.

And these creatures in the distance had something of the look of dragons.

Had the Melnibonéans discovered a means of waking the dragons before the end of their normal sleeping time? Had they unleashed their dragons to seek out Elric, who had slain his own kin, betrayed his unhuman kind in order to have his revenge on his cousin Yyrkoon who had usurped Elric's place on the Ruby Throne of Imrryr?

Now Elric's expression hardened into a grim mask. His crimson eyes shone like polished rubies. His left hand fell upon the hilt of his great black battleblade, the runesword Stormbringer, and he controlled a rising sense of horror.

For, in mid-air, the shapes had

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changed. No longer did they have the appearance of dragons, but this time they seemed to be like multicoloured swans, whose gleaming feathers caught and diffracted the few remaining rays of light.

Moonglum gasped as they came nearer. "They are huge!"

"Draw your swords, friend Moonglum. Draw them now and pray to whatever gods rule over Elwher, for these are creatures of sorcery doubtless sent by Theleb K'aarna to destroy us. My respect for that wizard increases."

"But what are they, Elric?"

"Creatures of Chaos. In Melniboné they are called the Oonai. They can change shape at will. A sorcerer of great mental powers who knows the right spells can master them and determine their appearance. Some of my ancestors could do such things, but I thought no mere conjuror of Pan Tang could master such chimerae."

"Do you know no spell to counter them?"

"None comes readily to mind. Only a Lord of Chaos such as my patron demon Arioch could dismiss them."

Moonglum shuddered. "Then call your Arioch, I beg you."

Elric darted a half-amused glance at Moonglum. "These creatures must fill you with great fear if you are prepared to entertain the presence of Arioch, Master Moonglum."

Moonglum drew his long, curved sword. Then he drew his straight one, curling his horse's reins around his arm.

Now a shrill, cackling sound came to them from the skies. The creatures had opened their beaks and were calling to each other and it was plain that they were indeed something else than gigantic swans, for they had curling tongues and there were slim, sharp fangs bristling in their beaks.

And Elric flung back his head as he drew out his great sword and raised it skyward. It pulsed and moaned and a strange, black radiance poured from it, casting peculiar shadows over its owner's bleached features.

The Shazarian horse screamed and reared and words began to pour from Elric's tormented face.

"Arioch! Arioch! Arioch! Arioch, Lord of the Seven Darks, Duke of Chaos, aid me! Aid me now, Arioch!"

Moonglum's own horse had backed away in panic and the little man was having great difficulty in controlling it. His own features were almost as pale as Elric's.

"Arioch!"

Overhead the chimerae began to circle.

"Arioch! Blood and souls if you will aid me now!"

Now, some yards away, a dark mist seemed to well up from nowhere, a boiling mist that had strange, disgusting shapes in it.

"Arioch! I beg you—aid me now!"

The horse pawed at the air, snorting and screaming, its eyes rolling, its nostrils flaring, yet Elric, his lips curled back over his teeth, continued to keep his seat as the dark mist quivered and a strange, unearthly face appeared near its top. It was a face of wonderful beauty, of absolute evil. Moonglum turned his head away, unable to regard it.

A sweet, sibilant voice issued from the beautiful mouth.

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"Greetings, most beloved of my children."

"Aid me, Arioch!"

"It is impossible, sweetest of my slaves. There are other matters afoot in the Realm of Chaos. Matters of enormous moment of which you shall hear in time. I offer only my blessings and hope that you shall live to serve Chaos in some form, if not your present one."

"Arioch—I beg thee!"

"Farewell, Elric."

And the dark mist vanished.

And the chimerae came closer.

And Elric drew a racking breath while the runesword whined in his hand and quivered and its radiance dimmed a little.

Moonglum spat on the ground. "A powerful patron, Elric, but an inconstant one." Then he flung himself from his saddle as a creature which changed its shape a dozen times as it arrowed towards him reached out huge claws which clashed in the air where he had been. The riderless horse reared again, striking out at the beast of Chaos. A fanged snout snapped. Blood vomited from the place where the horse's head had been and the carcass kicked once more before falling to the ground to pour more gore into the greedy earth. Bearing the remains of the head in what was first a scaled snout, then a beak, then a sharklike mouth, the Oonai thrashed back into the air.

Moonglum picked himself up. His eyes contemplated nothing but his own imminent destruction.

Elric, too, leapt from his horse and slapped its flank so that convulsively it began to gallop away towards the river. Another chimera followed it, seized the beast in its suddenly sprouting claws and flapped towards the clouds.

Snow fell thicker now, but Elric and Moonglum were oblivious of it as they stood together and awaited the next attack of the Oonai.

Moonglum gasped: "Is there no other spell, Elric?"

The albino shook his head. "None that I recall. The Oonai always served the folk of Melniboné. They never threatened us."

The chimerae cackled and yelled in the air above the companions' heads, then another broke away from the pack and dived to the Earth.

"They attack individually," Eric panted. "They never attack in a pack. I know not why."

The Oonai had settled on the ground and now had assumed the shape of an elephant with the huge head of a crocodile. The ground shook as it charged towards them.

At the last moment they divided, Elric leaping one way and Moonglum the other. It passed between them and Elric struck at the thing's thick side with his runesword. The sword sang out almost lasciviously as it bit deep into the flesh which instantly changed and became a dragon dripping flaming venom from its fangs. But it was badly wounded. Blood ran from the deep wound and the chimera screamed and changed shape again and again as if seeking some form in which the wound could not exist.

Black blood now burst from its side as if the strain of the many changes had ruptured the creature worse. It fell

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to its knees and the lustre faded from its feathers, died from its scales, disappeared from its skin. It kicked out once and then was still, a heavy, black, piglike creature whose lumpen body was the ugliest Elric or Moonglum had ever seen.

Moonglum grunted. "It is not hard to understand why such a creature should want to change its form . . ." He looked up. Another was descending. This had the appearance of a whale with wings, but with the curved fangs of a python and a tail like an enormous corkscrew.

Even as it landed it changed again. Now it had assumed human form—a huge, beautiful figure, twice as tall as Elric, naked and perfectly proportioned, but with the vacant stare and drooling lips of an idiot child. Lithely, it ran at them, the huge hands reaching out to grasp them.

This time Elric and Moonglum struck together, one at each hand. Moonglum's sharp sword cut the knuckles deeply and Elric lopped off two fingers before the Oonai altered its shape again and began first to be an octopus, then a monstrous tiger, then a combination of both, until at last it was a rock in which a fissure grew to reveal white, snapping teeth.

Gasping, the two men waited for it to resume the attack. At the base of the rock some blood was oozing. This put a thought into Elric's mind and with a sudden yell he leapt forward, raised his sword over his head and brought it down on top of the rock, splitting it in twain.

Something like a laugh issued from the black sword then as the sundered shape flickered and became a piglike creature, cut completely in two.

Then, through the snowy dusk, another of the Oonai came down, its body a glowing orange, its shape that of a winged snake with a thousand rippling coils.

Elric struck at the coils, but they moved too rapidly. The other chimerae had been watching his tactics with their dead companions and they had now gauged the skill of their victims. Almost immediately Elric's arms were pinned to his sides by the coils and he found himself being borne upward as a second chimera with the same shape rushed down on Moonglum to seize him in an identical manner.

Elric prepared to die as the horses had died.

The scaly wings flapped powerfully as he and his friend were carried swiftly southward over the great Lormyrian steppe.

THREE

NIGHT FELL AND the chimerae flew on tirelessly while Elric kept hold of his runesword and racked his brains for some means of defeating the monsters.

Presumably the reason why they had not destroyed him and Moonglum was because Theleb K'aarna had it in mind to slay them slowly.

Elric's skill in sorcery lay chiefly in his command over the various elementals of air, fire, earth, water and ether, and also over the entities who had affinities with flora and fauna of the Earth.

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He had decided that his only hope lay in summoning the aid of Fileet, Lady of the Birds, who dwelt in a realm lying beyond the planes of Earth.

But the mind had to be adjusted, the correct rhythms of the spell remembered, the exact words recalled, before he could even begin the attempt to summon Fileet's aid, for she, more than any other elemental, was difficult to call and as fickle as Arioch.

Through the drifting snow he heard Moonglum call out something indistinct. His face was chill and ice had formed on his helmet and breastplate, his whole body ached both from the crushing toils of the chimera and the biting cold of the air.

On and on through the southern night they flew while Elric forced himself to relax, to descend into a trance and to dredge from his mind the ancient knowledge of his forefathers.

At dawn the clouds had cleared and the sun's red rays spread over the snow like blood over damask. Everywhere the steppe was covered by snow while above it the sky was a blue sheet of ice.

And tirelessly the chimerae flew on as Elric brought himself slowly from his trance and prayed to his untrustworthy gods that he remembered the spell aright.

His lips were half frozen together. He licked them and opened them and bitter air coursed into his mouth. He coughed then turned his head upwards, his crimson eyes glazing.

Feathers fine our fates entwined,
Bird and man and thine and mine,
Formed a pact that Gods divine
Hallowed on an ancient shrine,
When kind swore service unto kind.

Fileet, fair feathered queen of flight,
Remember now that fateful night
And help your brother in his plight.

Centuries before, the sorcerers of Melniboné had struck this bargain with Fileet, Lady of the Birds: That any bird that settled in Imrryr's walls should be protected, that no bird would be shot by any of the Melnibonéan blood. This bargain had been kept and dreaming Imrryr had become a haven for all species of birds and at one time they had cloaked her towers in plumage.

Now Elric chanted his verses, recalling that bargain and begging Fileet to remember her part of it.

Not for the first time had he called upon the elementals and those akin to them. But lately he had summoned Haaashaastaak, Lord of the Lizards, in his fight against Theleb K'aarna and earlier had made use of the services of the wind elementals—the sylphs, the sharnahs and the h'Haarshanns—and of the elementals of the earth.

Yet Fileet was fickle. She could even choose, now that Imrryr was no more, to forget that ancient pact.

But the air was stirring and a huge shadow fell across the chimerae bearing Elric and Moonglum northward.

Elric's voice faltered as he looked up. And then he smiled.

"I thank you, Fileet."

The sky was black with birds. There were eagles and robins and rooks and wrens and kites and crows and hawks and peacocks and flamingoes and pigeons and doves and parrots and mag-

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pies and ravens. Their plumage flashed and the air was full of their cries.

The Oonai raised its snake's head and hissed, its long tongue curling out between its front fangs, its coiled tail lashing. One of the chimerae not carrying Elric or Moonglum changed its shape into that of a gigantic condor and flapped up towards the vast array of birds. But they were not deceived. The chimera disappeared, submerged by birds. There was a frightful screaming noise and then something black and piglike spiralled to earth, blood and entrails streaming in its wake.

Another chimera—the last not bearing a burden—assumed its dragon shape, almost completely identical to those which Elric had once mastered as ruler of Melniboné.

There was a sickening smell of burning flesh and feathers as the flaming venom fell upon Elric's allies. But more and more birds filled the air, shrieking and whistling, a million wings fluttering, and once again the Oonai was hidden from sight, once again a mangled, piglike corpse plummetted groundwards.

Now the birds divided into two masses, turning their attention to the chimerae bearing Elric and Moonglum. Ten huge golden eagles led each group, diving at the flashing eyes of the Oonai.

As the birds attacked, the chimerae were forced to change shape. Instantly Elric felt himself fall free. His body was numb and he fell like a stone and as he fell he cursed at the irony. He had been saved from the beasts of Chaos only to hurtle to his death on the snow-covered ground below.

But then he felt his cloak caught from above. Several eagles had grasped his clothing in their beaks and had slowed his descent so that he was borne gently to the snow.

A few yards away Moonglum was deposited on the ground and, further away, two more piglike corpses thudded down.

Then the huge mass of birds broke up into squadrons of their separate species and, within minutes, had vanished.

Elric picked his bruised body up and stiffly he sheathed his sword Stormbringer. He drew a deep breath. "Fileet, I thank thee again."

Moonglum, dazed and puzzled, stumbled up to him. "From whence came the birds, Elric? Did you summon them?"

Elric nodded. "An ancient bargain my ancestors made. I was hard-pressed to remember the lines of the spell."

"I'm mightily pleased that you did remember!"

Elric nodded absently. He was staring about him. Everywhere stretched the vast, snow-covered Lormyrian steppe.

Moonglum became aware of Elric's thoughts. He rubbed his chin.

"Aye. We are fairly lost, Lord Elric. Have you any idea where we may be?"

"I do not know, Moonglum, how far those beasts carried us, but I'm fairly sure it was well to the south of Iosaz. We are further away from the capital than we were . . ."

"But then so must Theleb K'aarna be! If we were, indeed, being borne to where he was . . ."

Elric shrugged. "Perhaps not. Perhaps his idea was to take us to where

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we could not interfere with his plans . . . Well, speculation will do nothing for us. That way lies Iosaz. We must begin walking and hope that we can find a river that has not frozen over and that the river will bear us to Iosaz."

They began to trudge through the snow, two small figures in a frozen landscape.

Four

A day passed, a night passed.

The evening of the second day passed and the pair staggered on, though they had long-since lost their sense of direction.

Night fell and now they crawled, unable to speak, their bones stiff with cold and exhaustion, until they fell in the snow and lay motionless, for they saw no difference, now, between life and death, between existence and the lack of it.

And when the sun rose and warmed their flesh a little they stirred and raised their heads, perhaps for one last look at the world they were leaving.

And they saw the castle.

It stood there in the middle of the steppe and it was ancient. Snow covered the moss and lichen that grew on its worn, old stones. It seemed to have been there for eternity, yet neither man had ever heard of a castle on the steppe, a castle in the land that had once been known as World's Edge.

Moonglum was the first to rise. He stumbled through the deep snow to where Elric lay and, with chapped hands, tried to lift his friend.

Elric's thin blood had almost ceased to move in his body. He moaned as Moonglum helped him to his feet. He tried to speak, but his lips were frozen shut.

Clutching each other, sometimes walking, sometimes crawling, they made for the castle.

Its entrance stood open. They fell through it and the warmth issuing from the interior revived them sufficiently to allow them to rise and stagger down a narrow passage into a great hall that was completely bare of furnishings, save for a huge log fire that blazed in a grate at the far end.

"So the castle is inhabited." Moonglum stared around him. He raised his voice as best he could and called. "Greetings to whoever is master of this hall. We are Moonglum of Elwher and Elric of Melniboné and we crave your hospitality, for we are lost in your land."

Echoes answered Moonglum.

After a moment, he dragged Elric to the fire and lay him down near it. Then he ascended the stone stair leading to the next floor of the castle.

This floor was as bereft of furniture or decoration as the other. There were many rooms, but all of them empty. Yet someone had laid the fire. If they had left the castle recently, he would have noticed the tracks outside.

Moonglum descended the stairs and saw that Elric had revived enough to prop himself up against the chimney-piece.

"Wait here, Lord Elric, I'll seek the pantry."

He opened a door in the side of the hall and went along a short passage until he found the castle's kitchens. In

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a cupboard the best part of a large deer was hanging and on a shelf were several bottles of wine. With his short sword Moonglum cut off a haunch of venison and put it under his arm, then he took down one of the bottles, pulled out the cork and sniffed the contents. He had smelled nothing more delicate or delicious in his life.

He returned to the hall and helped Elric drink from the bottle.

The strange wine worked almost instantly and Elric offered Moonglum a smile that had gratitude in it.

Moonglum turned away with an embarrassed grunt and began to prepare the meat which he intended to roast over the fire. He had never understood his relationship with the albino—it had always been a peculiar mixture of reservation and affection, a fine balance which both men were careful to maintain, even in situations of this kind. Elric, since his passion for Cymoril had resulted in her death and the destruction of the city he loved, had at all times feared bestowing any tender emotion on those he met. He had run away from Shaarilla of the Dancing Mist as he had fled from Queen Yishana of Jharkor not long since. He disdained most company save Moonglum's and Moonglum, too, became quickly bored by anyone apart from the crimson-eyed Prince of Imrryr. Moonglum would die for Elric and he knew that Elric would risk any danger to save his friend. But as to understanding why this should be, he had none—and he guessed that Elric was equally mystified.

He considered these thoughts as he roasted the meat before the fire, using his long sword as a spit. Meanwhile Elric took another draft of wine and began, almost visibly, to thaw out. His skin was still badly blistered by chilblains, but both men had escaped serious frostbite.

They ate the venison in silence, glancing around the hall, puzzling over the non-appearance of the owner, yet too tired to care greatly where he was.

They they slept, having put fresh logs on the fire, and in the morning were almost completely recovered from their ordeal in the snow.

Moonglum found a pot and heated water in it so that they might shave and wash and Elric found some salve in his pouch which they could put on their skin.

"I looked in the stables," Moonglum said as they chewed on the venison left over from the previous night, "but I found no horses. Though some beasts have been kept there recently."

"There is only one other way to travel," Elric said. "There might be skis somewhere in the castle. They would speed our progress back towards Iosaz."

Moonglum agreed. "I'll search the upper levels."

Elric got up. "I'll go with you."

Through the empty rooms they wandered until they came at length to a stair that wound up to the highest tower of the castle. They climbed this stair and came to a door that was half-open. Elric pushed it back and then hesitated.

"This room is furnished," he said quietly.

Moonglum peered in round Elric's shoulder and then gasped.

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"And occupied!"

In a beautiful room hung with soft silks of many colours, on an ermine draped bed in the centre, lay a young woman.

Her hair was black and shone. Her gown was of the deepest scarlet and her face and limbs were very fair.

She was asleep.

Elric took two steps towards her and then stopped, shuddering. He turned away.

Moonglum was shocked. There were bright tears in Elric's crimson eyes. "What is it . . . ?"

Elric moved his lips but was incapable of speech.

"Elric . . ." Moonglum placed a hand on his friend's arm. Elric shook it off.

Slowly the albino turned again, as if forcing himself to behold an impossibly horrifying sight. At last he spoke.

"This is a sorcerous sleep, Moonglum. It—it—is a similar slumber to that in which my cousin Yyrkoon put my Cymoril . . ."

"Gods! Think you that—?"

"I think nothing!"

"But it is not—"

"It is not Cymoril. I—she is like her, I'll admit. But unlike her, too . . . It is just that I was not expecting . . ." Elric bowed his head. "Come, let's begone from here."

"But she must be the owner of this castle. If we awakened her we could—"

"She cannot be awakened by us. I told you. It is an enchanted sleep she is in. I could not wake Cymoril from it. Unless one has certain magical aids, there is nothing that can be done. Quickly, Moonglum, let us depart."

The edge to Elric's voice made Moonglum shiver.

"But . . ."

"Then I will go."

Elric almost ran from the room. Moonglum heard his footsteps going down the long staircase.

He went up to the sleeping woman and stared down at her incredible beauty. He touched the skin. It was unnaturally cold. He shrugged and left the chamber, pausing for a moment only to look at the number of battle-shields and other weapons that hung on the walls of the room. Strange trophies for a beautiful woman to decorate her bedroom with, he thought.

He followed Elric down to the hall of the mysterious castle.

Five

And two days later they reached the upper reaches of the Zaphra-Trepek and the trading town of Alorasaz with its towers of finely carved wood and its beautifully made timber houses. To Alorasaz came the fur trappers and the miners, the merchants from Iosaz, downriver, or from afar as Trepesaz on the coast. A cheerful, bustling town with its streets lit and heated by great, red braziers at every corner.

Elric and Moonglum made their way through the rumbustious crowd—laughing, red-cheeked women and burly, fur-swathed men whose breath steamed in the air, mingling with the smoke from the braziers, as they took huge swallows from gourds of beer or skins of wine, conducting their business

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with the slightly less bucolic merchants of the northern towns.

Elric was looking for news and he knew that if he found it anywhere it would be in the taverns. He waited while Moonglum followed his nose to the best of Alorosaz's inns and came back with knowledge of its whereabouts.

They walked a short distance and entered a rowdy tavern crammed with big, wooden tables and benches on which were jammed more traders and more merchants arguing cheerfully with them.

Moonglum had already approached the landlord, a hugely fat man with a glistening scarlet face, who greeted them with a bellow and signed for them to follow him through the press, up a flight of swaying wooden stairs; along a landing and into a private room which Moonglum had booked.

"Such rooms as these are expensive during the winter market," the landlord said apologetically. And Moonglum winced as, silently, Elric handed the man another precious gem worth a small fortune.

The landlord looked at it and laughed. "This inn will have fallen down before your credit's up, master. I thank thee. I'll have meats and wines sent up immediately."

After they had eaten and discovered from the landlord that a ship was leaving the day after tomorrow for Iosaz, Elric and Moonglum went to their separate rooms to sleep.

Elric's dreams were troubled that night. More than usual phantoms came to walk the dark corridors of his mind. He saw Cymoril screaming as the Black Sword drank her soul, he saw Imrryr burning, her fine towers crumbling, he saw his cackling cousin Yyrkoon sprawling on the Ruby Throne. Never quite suited to be ruler of the cruel folk of Melniboné, Elric had wandered the lands of men only to discover that he had no place there, either. And in the meantime Yyrkoon had usurped the kingship, had tried to force Cymoril to be his and, when she refused, put her into a deep and sorcerous slumber from which only he could wake her.

Now Elric dreamed that he had found a Nanorion, the mystic gem which could awaken even the dead. He dreamed that Cymoril was still alive but sleeping and that he placed the Nanorion on her forehead and she woke up and kissed him and left Imrryr with him, sailing through the skies on Flamefang, the great Melnibonéan battle dragon, away to a peaceful castle in the snow . . .

He awoke with a start.

It was the dead of night. Even the noise from the tavern below had subsided. Elric kept his eyes shut but his hand gripped the hilt of Stormbringer which lay beside him in the bed. He could sense a presence in the room, whether mortal or supernatural he could not tell.

Slowly he opened his eyes.

She was standing there, her black hair curling over her shoulders, her scarlet gown clinging to her body. Her lips curved in a smile of irony and her eyes regarded him steadily.

She was the woman he had seen in the castle. The sleeping woman. Was this part of the dream?

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"Forgive me for thus intruding upon your slumber and your privacy, my lord, but my business is urgent and I have little time to spare."

As Elric sat upright in his bed, Stormbringer moaned softly and then was silent. "You seem to know me, my lady, but I do not—"

"I am called Myshella . . ."

"Empress of the Dawn?"

She smiled again. "Some have called me that. And others have called me the Sorceress of Kaneloon."

"Whom Aubec loved? Then you must have preserved your youth carefully, Lady Myshella."

"No doing of mine. It is possible that I am immortal. But I cannot stay for long, so let us not discuss my origins, but the matter in hand."

"What is that?"

"We have an enemy in common, I believe."

"Theleb K'aarna?"

"The same."

"Did he place that enchantment upon you that made you sleep?"

"Aye."

"And he sent his Oonai against me. That is how—"

She raised her hand. "I sent the chimerae to find you and bring you to me. They meant you no harm. It was the only thing I could do, for Theleb K'aarna's spell was already beginning to work. I battle his sorcerery, but it is strong and I am able to revive only for short periods. This is one such period. Theleb K'aarna has joined forces with Prince Umbda, Lord of the Kelmain Hosts. Their plan is to conquer Lormyr and, ultimately, the entire Southern continent."

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"Who is this Umbda? I have heard neither of him nor of the Kelmain Hosts. Some noble of Iosaz, perhaps, who—"

"Prince Umbda serves Chaos. He comes from the lands beyond World's Edge and his Kelmain are not men at all, though they have the appearance of men."

"So Theleb K'aarna was in the far south, after all."

"That is why I came to you tonight."

"You wish me to help you?"

"We both need Theleb K'aarna destroyed. His sorcery is what enabled Prince Umbda to cross World's Edge. I protect Lormyr and I serve Law. I know that you serve Chaos, yet . . ."

"Chaos has not served me, of late, lady, so forget that loyalty. I would have my vengeance on Theleb K'aarna and if we can help each other in the matter, so much the better."

"Good." She gasped and her eyes glazed. When next she spoke it was with some difficulty. "The enchantment is exerting its hold again. I have a steed for you near the town's north gate. It will bear you to an island in the Boiling Sea. On that island is a palace called Ashanaloon. It is there that I have dwelt of late, until I sensed Lormyr's danger. But Theleb K'aarna expected me to try to return there and placed a guardian at the palace's gate. That guardian must be destroyed. When you have destroyed it you must go to the . . ." She swayed. "You must go to the eastern tower. In the tower's lower room is a chest. In the chest is a large pouch of cloth-of-gold. You must take that and bring it back to Kaneloon, for Umbda and his Kelmain now march against the castle. Theleb K'aarna will destroy the castle with their help—and destroy me, also. With the pouch, I may destroy them. But pray that I am able to wake, or the South is doomed and even you will not be able to go against the power that Theleb K'aarna will wield."

"What of Moonglum, can he accompany me?"

"There is no time . . ." She gasped again and flung her arm across her forehead. "No time . . ."

Elric leapt from the bed and began to pull on his breeks. He took his cloak from where it was draped across a stool and buckled on his runesword. He went forward to help her, then, but she signalled him away.

"No . . . Go, please . . ."

And she had vanished.

Still half asleep Elric flung open the door and dashed down the stairs, out into the night, racing for the north gate of Alorosaz, passing through it and stopping in his tracks when he saw the nature of the steed Myshella had provided for him.

Six

IT WAS A BIRD, but it was not a bird of flesh and blood. It was a bird of gold and silver and brass. Its wings clashed as he approached it and it moved its huge clawed feet impatiently, turning cold, emerald eyes to regard him. On its back was a saddle of carved onyx. Pausing only briefly, Elric made for the bird and climbed somewhat cautiously into the saddle.

The wings of gold and silver flapped with the sound of a hundred cymbals

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meeting and with three movements had taken the bird of metal and its rider high into the night sky above Alorosaz. It turned its bright head on its neck of brass and it opened its curved beak of gem-studded steel. "Well, master, I am commanded to take thee to Ashanaloon."

Elric waved a pale hand. "Wherever you will. I am at the mercy of you and your mistress."

And then he was jerked backward in the saddle as the bird's flight gathered speed and he was rushing through the chill night, over snowy plains, over mountains, over rivers, until the coast came in sight, and the sea in the West called the Boiling Sea.

Down through pitch blackness the bird of gold and silver dropped and Elric felt damp heat strike his face and hands, heard a peculiar bubbling sound, and he knew he was over that strange sea said to be fed by volcanoes lying deep below its surface, a sea where no ships sailed.

Steam surrounded them now and its heat was almost unbearable, but through it Elric began to make out the silhouette of a landmass, a small rocky island on which stood a single building with slender towers and turrets and domes. The palace of Ashanaloon.

"I will alight among the battlements, master," said the bird of silver and gold, "but I fear that thing you must meet before our errand is accomplished, so I will await you elsewhere. Then, if you live, I will return to take you back to Kaneloon. And, if you die, I will go back to tell my mistress of your failure."

Over the battlements the bird now hovered, its wings beating, and Elric reflected that there would be no advantage of surprise over whatever it was guarding the palace. He leapt from saddle to battlements and watched as the bird hastily retreated into the black sky.

He was alone.

It was silent, save for the beating of warm waves on a distant shore. He made his way towards a door in the eastern tower.

A huge bellow sounded behind him. He wheeled. A creature stood there, its red-rimmed eyes full of insensate malice.

"So you are Theleb K'aarna's slave," said Elric. He reached for Stormbringer and the sword seemed to spring into his hand at its own volition. "Must I kill you, or will you begone now?"

The creature bellowed again.

"I am Elric of Melniboné, last of a line of great sorcerer kings. This blade I wield will do more than kill you, friend demon. It will drink your soul and feed it to me. Perhaps you have heard of me by that name? By the name of the Soul Stealer?"

The creature lashed its serrated tail and its bovine nostrils distended. The horned head swayed on the short neck and the long teeth gleamed in the darkness. It reached out scaly claws and began to lumber towards the Prince of Ruins.

Elric took the sword in both hands and spread his feet on the flagstones and prepared to meet the monster's charge. Foul breath struck his face. Another bellow and then it was upon him.

Stormbringer howled and spilled

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black radiance over both. The runes carved in the blade glowed with a greedy glow as the thing of Hell slashed at Elric's body with its claws, ripping the shirt from him and baring his chest.

The sword came down. The demon roared as the scales of its shoulder received the blow but did not part. It danced to one side and attacked again. Elric swayed back, but now a thin wound was opened in his arm from elbow to wrist. Stormbringer struck forward and hit the demon's snout so that it shrieked and lashed again. Stormbringer flashed upward and then down and thudded on the creature's skull. Again its claws found Elric's body and blood smeared his chest from a shallow cut. Then he reversed his grip on the runesword and plunged it point first into the demon's open jaws, plunged it down the stinking throat, down into the torso. Then he wrenched the blade so that it split jaw, neck, chest and groin and the creature's life force began to be channelled along the length of the runesword until it reached Elric who gasped and screamed in dark ecstasy as the demon's energy poured into him and the corpse dropped moaning to the flagstones.

And it was done.

And a white faced demon stood over the dead thing of Hell and its crimson eyes blazed and its pale mouth opened and it roared with wild laughter, flinging its arms upward, the runesword blazing, and howling a wordless, exultant song to the Lord of Chaos.

And then it bowed its head and wept.

Now Elric opened the door to the eastern tower and stumbled through absolute blackness until he came to the lowest room. The door to the room was locked and barred, but Stormbringer smashed through it and the Last Lord of Melniboné entered a lighted room in which squatted a chest of iron. His sword sundered the bands securing the chest and he flung open the lid and saw that there were many wonders in the chest, as well as the pouch made from cloth-of-gold which he picked out and tucked into his belt as he raced from the room, back to the battlements where a bird of silver and gold was pecking with its steel beak at the remnants of Theleb K'aarna's guardian.

It looked up as Elric returned.

"Well, master, we must make haste to Kaneloon."

"Aye." Nausea had begun to fill Elric. His eyes were gloomy as he contemplated the corpse and that which he had stolen from it.

Then he saw something gleaming amongst the black and yellow entrails he had spilled. It was the demon's heart. An irregularly shaped stone of deep blue and purple and green that pulsed on, though its owner was dead. Elric stooped and picked it up. It was wet and so hot that it almost burned his hand, but he tucked it into his belt, too, then mounted the bird of silver and gold.

His bone-white face flickered with a dozen strange emotions as he let the bird bear him back over the Boiling Sea. His milk-white hair flew wildly behind him and he was oblivious of the demon's wounds on his arm and chest.

He was thinking of other things, some in the past and some in the fu-

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ture. And he laughed bitterly twice and his eyes shed tears and he spoke once.

"Oh, this agony that is life!"

Seven

To Kaneloon they came in the early dawn and in the distance Elric saw a massive army darkening the snow and he knew it must be the Kelmain Host, led by Theleb K'aarna and Prince Umbda, marching against the lonely castle.

The bird of gold and silver flapped down in the snow outside the castle's entrance and Elric dismounted. Then the bird had risen into the air again and was gone.

The great gate of Castle Kaneloon was closed this time. Gathering his tattered cloak about his naked torso, Elric hammered on the gate with his fists and forced sounds through his dry lips.

"Myshella! Myshella! I have returned with that which you need!"

He feared she must have fallen into her enchanted slumber again. He looked towards the south and the dark tide had rolled a little closer to the castle.

"Myshella!"

Then he heard a bar being drawn and the gates groaned open and there stood Moonglum, his face strained and his eyes full of something he could not speak of.

"How came you here, Moonglum?"

"I lay in my bed last night when a woman came to me—the same woman we saw. She said I must go with her. Somehow I came here, but I know not how."

"And where is that woman?"

"Where we first saw her. She sleeps and I cannot wake her."

Elric drew a deep breath and told, briefly, what he knew of Myshella and the host that came against her Kaneloon.

"Do you know the contents of that pouch?" Moonglum asked.

Elric shook his head and opened the pouch to peer inside. "It seems to be nothing but a pinkish dust. But it must be some powerful magic if Myshella believes it can defeat the entire Kelmain Host."

"But she needs to work the charm."

"Aye."

"And Theleb K'aarna has enchanted her."

"Aye."

"And now it is too late, for Umbda—whoever he may be—nears the castle."

"Aye." Elric's hand trembled as he drew from his belt the thing he had taken from the demon. "Unless this is what I think it is."

"What is that?"

"I know a legend. Some demons possess these stones as hearts." He held it to the light so that the blues and purples and greens writhed. "I have never seen one, but I believe it to be the thing I once sought for Cymoril. What I sought and never found, then, was a Nanorion. A stone of magical powers said to be able to waken the dead—or those in deathlike sleep."

"And that is a Nanorion. It will awaken Myshella?"

"If anything can, it will, for I took it from Theleb K'aarna's own demon and that must improve the effect-

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iveness of the magic. Come." Elric strode through the hall and up the stairs until he came to Myshella's room where she lay, as he had seen her before, on the bed hung with draperies, her walls hung with shields and weapons.

"Now I understand why these arms decorate her chamber," Moonglum said. "According to legend, these are the shields and weapons of all those who loved Myshella and championed her cause."

Elric nodded and said, as if to himself, "Aye, she was ever an enemy of Melniboné, the Empress of the Dawn."

He held the pulsing stone delicately and reached out to place it on her forehead.

"It makes no difference," Moonglum said after a moment.

"There is a rune, but I remember it not . . ." Elric pressed his fingers to his temples. "I remember it not . . ."

Tears were coming again and he turned away so that Moonglum should not see them. Moonglum cleared his throat and said: "I have some business below. Call me if you should require my help."

He left the room and closed the door and Elric was alone with the woman who seemed, increasingly, a dreadful phantom from his most frightful dreams.

He controlled his feverish mind and tried to discipline it, to remember the crucial rune in the Old Speech of Melniboné.

"Gods!" he hissed. "Help me!"

But he knew that in this matter in particular the Lords of Chaos would not assist him—would hinder him if they could, for Myshella was one of the chief instruments of Law upon the Earth, had been responsible for driving Chaos from the world.

He fell to his knees beside her bed, his hands clenched, his face twisting with the effort.

And then it came back to him. His head still bent, he stretched out his right hand and touched the pulsing stone, stretched out his left hand and rested it upon Myshella's navel, and began a chant in an ancient tongue that had been spoken before true men had ever walked the Earth . . .

"Elric!"

Moonglum burst into the room and Elric was wrenched from his trance.

"Elric! Their outriders. We are invaded!"

"What?"

"They have broken into the castle—a dozen of them. I fought them off and barred the way up to this tower, but they are hacking at the door now. I think they have been sent to destroy Myshella if they could. They were surprised to discover me here."

Elric rose and looked carefully down at Myshella. The rune was finished and had been repeated almost fully again when Moonglum had come in. She did not stir.

"Theleb K'aarna worked his sorcery from a distance," Moonglum said. "Ensuring that Myshella would not resist him. But he did not reckon with us."

He and Elric hurried from the room, down the steps to where a door was bulging and splintering beneath the weapons of those beyond.

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"Stand back, Moonglum."

Elric drew the crooning runesword, lifted it high and brought it against the door.

It split and two oddly shaped skulls were split with it.

The remainder of the attackers fell back with cries of astonishment and horror as the white-faced reaver fell upon them, his huge sword drinking their souls and singing its strange, ululating song.

Down the stairs Elric pursued them. Into the hall where they bunched together and prepared to defend themselves from this demon with his hell-forged blade.

And Elric laughed.

And they shuddered and their weapons trembled in their hands.

"So you are the mighty Kelmain," Elric sneered. "No wonder you needed sorcery to aid you if you are so cowardly. Have you not heard, beyond World's Edge, of Elric Kinslayer?"

But the Kelmain plainly did not understand his speech, which was strange enough in itself, for he spoke the Common Tongue, known to all men.

These people had golden skins and eye-sockets that were almost square. Their faces seemed carved crudely from rock, all sharp angles and planes, and their armour was not rounded, but angular.

Elric bared his teeth in a smile and the Kelmain drew closer together.

Then he screamed with maniacal laughter and Moonglum stepped back and did not look at what took place.

The runesword swung. Heads and limbs were chopped away. Blood gouted. Souls were taken. The Kelmain's dead faces bore expressions showing that, before the life was drawn from them, they had known the truth of their appalling fate.

And Stormbringer drank again, for Stormbringer was a thirsty hellsword.

And Elric felt his deficient veins swell with even more energy than that which he had taken earlier from Theleb K'aarna's demon.

The hall shook with Elric's mad mirth and he strode out of it, leaving the bodies behind, and he called a name:

"Theleb K'aarna! Theleb K'aarna!"

Moonglum ran after him, calling for him to stop, but Elric did not heed him. Elric strode on through the snow, his sword dripping a red trail behind him.

Under a cold sun the Kelmain were riding for the castle called Kaneloon and Elric went to meet them.

At their head, on slender horses, rode the dark-faced sorcerer of Pan Tang, dressed in flowing robes, and beside him was the Prince of the Kelmain Host, Prince Umbda, in proud armour, bizarre plumes nodding on his helm, a triumphant smile on his strange, angular features.

Behind, the host dragged oddly-fashioned wargear which, nonetheless, looked powerful—mightier than anything Lormyr could rally when the huge army fell upon her.

As the lone figure appeared from Castle Kaneloon Theleb K'aarna raised his hand and stopped the host's advance, reining in his own horse and laughing.

"The jackal of Melniboné, by all the

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Gods of Chaos! He acknowledges his master at last and comes to deliver himself up to me!"

Elric did not pause, seemed not to hear the Pan Tangian's words.

Prince Umbda's eyes were troubled as he said something in a strange tongue. Theleb K'aarna sniffed and replied in the same language.

And still the albino marched through the snow towards the huge host.

"By Chardros, Elric, stop!" cried Theleb K'aarna, his horse shifting nervously beneath him. "If you have come to bargain, you are a fool. Kaneloon and her mistress must fall before Lormyr is ours—and Lormyr *shall* be ours!"

Then Elric did stop and brought up his eyes to burn into those of the sorcerer and there was still a cold smile upon his pale lips.

Theleb K'aarna tried to meet Elric's gaze but could not. His voice trembled when he next spoke.

"You cannot defeat the whole Kelmain Host!"

"I have no wish to, conjurer. Your life is all I desire."

The sorcerer's face twitched. "Well, you shall not have it! Hai, men of the Kelmain, take him!" He wheeled his horse and rode into the protective ranks of his warriors, calling out his orders in their own tongue.

From the castle another figure burst, rushing to join Elric.

It was Moonglum.

Elric heard him shout and called: "Stay back, Moonglum!"

Moonglum hesitated.

"Stay back, if you love me!"

Moonglum reluctantly retreated to the castle.

The Kelmain horsemen swept in, broad-bladed straight swords raised, instantly surrounding the albino.

Stormbringer began to sing. Elric grasped the sword with both hands, bent his elbows then suddenly held the blade straight out before him. He began to whirl like a Tarkeshite dancer, round and round, and it was as if the sword dragged him faster and faster while it gouged and gashed and decapitated the Kelmain horsemen.

For a moment they fell back, leaving their dead comrades heaped about the albino, but Prince Umbda, after a hurried conference with Theleb K'aarna, urged them upon Elric again.

Now it dawned on Elric that, for some reason, his blade was sated. The energy still pulsed in its metal, but it transferred nothing to its master. And his own stolen energy was beginning to wane.

He was still stronger than normal and much stronger than any ordinary mortal, but some of the wild anger was leaving him and he looked almost puzzled as more Kelmain came on.

He fought on.

He struck at legs and arms and chests and faces and he was covered from head to foot in the blood of his attackers.

But the dead now hampered him worse than the living, for their corpses were everywhere and he almost lost his footing more than once.

He fought for another hour before his defence weakened sufficiently for a rider, half-mad with terror, to strike

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a blow at his head. It failed to split it but stunned him so that he fell upon the bodies of the slain, tried to rise, then was struck again and lost consciousness.

EIGHT

"IT WAS MORE than I hoped," murmured Theleb K'aarna in satisfaction, "but we have taken him alive!"

Elric opened his eyes and looked with hatred on the sorcerer who was stroking his black forked beard as if to comfort himself.

"Well, renegade, you have put yourself in my power by your foolishness. There's many a bargain I can strike with the denizens of other planes, were I to offer them your soul. Your body I will keep for myself—to show Queen Yishana what I did to her lover before he died . . ."

Elric laughed shortly and looked about him. The Kelmain were awaiting orders. They had still not marched on Kaneloon. The sun was low in the sky. He saw the piled corpses behind him. He saw the hatred and fear on the faces of the golden-skinned Host, and he smiled again.

"I do not love Yishana. It is your jealous mind that makes you think so. I left Yishana to find you. It is not love that moves Elric of Melniboné, sorcerer, but hatred."

Theleb K'aarna tittered. "When the whole South falls to me and my comrades, then I will court Yishana and offer to make her Queen of all the West as well as all the South. Perhaps we shall own the whole world in a year or two . . ."

"You Pan Tangians were always an insecure race, forever planning conquest, forever seeking to destroy the equilibrium of the Young Kingdoms."

Theleb K'aarna sneered. "One day Pan Tang will have an empire that will make the Bright Empire seem a mere flickering ember in the fire of history."

"I am bored by this. What do you intend to do with me?"

"First I will hurt your body. I will hurt it delicately at first, building up the pain, until I have you in the proper frame of mind. Then I will consort with the Lords of the Higher Planes to find which will give me most for your soul."

"And what of Kaneloon?"

"The Kelmain will deal with Kaneloon. One knife is all that's needed now to slit Myshella's throat as she sleeps."

"She is protected."

Theleb K'aarna's brow darkened. "Aye, but the gate will fall soon enough and your little redhaired friend will perish as Myshella perishes." He ran his fingers through his oiled ringlets. "I am allowing, at Prince Umbda's request, the Kelmain to rest a while before storming the castle. But Kaneloon will be burning by nightfall."

Elric looked towards the castle. Plainly his runes had failed to counter Theleb K'aarna's spell. Then he saw a flash of gold and silver among the battlements and some thought below his consciousness made him react.

"Where is my sword?"

"We left it where you dropped it. The stinking hellblade is no use to us. And none to you, now . . ."

Elric wondered what would happen if he made a direct appeal to the sword.

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Theleb K'aarna had bound him tightly with ropes of silk.

He lifted himself to his feet. Theleb K'aarna watched him nervously as Elric moved in the churned snow. The sorcerer drew a curved knife.

Elric swayed, his eyes half-closed, and be began to murmur a name beneath his breath.

The sorcerer leapt forward and his arm encircled Elric's head while the knife pricked into the albino's throat. "Be silent, jackal!"

Elric murmured the words once more and Theleb K'aarna cursed, trying to prise Elric's mouth open. "The first thing I'll do is cut out that damned tongue of yours."

Elric bit the hand and tasted the sorcerer's blood. He spat it out. Theleb K'aarna screamed. "By Chardros, if I did not wish to see you die slowly I would . . ."

And then a sound came from the Kelmain. It was a moan of astonishment and it issued from every throat.

Theleb K'aarna turned and the breath hissed from between his clenched teeth.

Through the murky dusk a black shaped moved. It was the sword, Stormbringer. Elric had called it.

Theleb K'aarna flung Elric in the path of the sword and rushed into the security of the gathered ranks of Kelmain warriors.

The sword hovered in the air near Elric.

Another shout went up from the Kelmain. A shape had left the battlements of Castle Kaneloon. A shape with feathers of silver and gold. It flew high above the Host and hovered for a moment before moving to the outer edges of the gathering. Elric could not see it clearly, but he knew what it was. That was why he had summoned the sword, for he had an idea that Moonglum rode the giant bird of metal and that the Elwherian would try to rescue him.

Gently Stormbringer sliced Elric's bonds and, gently again, settled in his hand. Elric was free, but the Kelmain, encouraged by one victory, were determined that he would not have this freedom for long.

A huge mass of them rushed at him at once and he fought a defensive strategy this time, for his object was to stay alive as long as possible in the hope that Moonglum would descend and help him.

But the bird was even further away. It appeared to be circling the outer perimeters of the host and showed no interest in his plight at all.

Had he been wrong?

The Kelmain pressed him from all sides. The bird of gold and silver was almost out of sight now.

Theleb K'aarna had vanished also, but he was doubtless somewhere in the centre of the Kelmain ranks. Elric killed a golden-skinned warrior, slitting his throat with the point of the rune-sword, killed another with an overarm movement. But he was wearying rapidly now.

The bird seemed to change course and come back towards Kaneloon. Was it merely waiting for instructions from its sleeping mistress? Or was it refusing to obey Moonglum's commands?

Elric backed through the muddy, bloody snow so that the pile of corpses

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was behind him. He fought on.

The bird went past, far to his right.

Elric thought ironically that he had completely mistaken the significance of the bird's presence. He had merely brought the time of his death closer.

Kaneloon was doomed. Myshella was doomed. Lormyr and perhaps the whole of the Young Kingdoms were doomed.

And he was doomed.

It was then that a shadow passed across the battling men and the Kelmain screamed and fell back as a great din rent the air.

Elric looked up in relief, hearing the sound of the metal bird's clashing wings. He looked for Moonglum in the saddle and saw instead the tense face of Myshella, her hair blowing around her face as it was disturbed by the beating wings.

"Quickly, Lord Elric, before they close in again."

Elric sheathed the runesword and leapt towards the saddle, swinging himself behind the Sorceress of Kaneloon. Then they rose into the air again, while arrows hurtled around their heads and bounced off the bird's metal feathers.

"One more circuit of the Host and then we return to the Castle," she said. "Your rune and the Nanorion worked to defeat Theleb K'aarna's enchantment, but they took longer than either of us should have liked. See, already Prince Umbda is ordering his men to mount and ride on Castle Kaneloon. And Kaneloon has only Moonglum to defend her now."

"Why this circuit of Umbda's army?"

"You will see. At least, I hope you will see, my lord."

She began to sing a song. It was a strange, disturbing chant in a language not dissimilar to the Melnibonéan Old Speech, yet different enough for Elric to understand only a few words, for it was oddly accented.

Around the camp they flew. Elric saw the Kelmain get into battle order. Doubtless Umbda and Theleb K'aarna were planning the best mode of attack.

Then back to the castle beat the great bird, settling on the battlements and allowing Elric and Myshella to dismount. Moonglum, his features taut, came running to meet them.

They went to look at the Kelmain.

The Kelmain were on the move.

"What did you do to—" began Elric, but Myshella raised her hand.

"Perhaps I did nothing. Perhaps the sorcery will not work."

"What was it you . . . ?"

"I scattered the contents of the purse you brought. I scattered it around their whole army. Watch . . ."

"And if the spell has not worked—" Moonglum murmured. He paused, straining his eyes through the gloom. "What is that?"

"It is the Noose of Flesh," said Myshella in satisfaction.

Something was growing from out of the snow. Something pink that quivered. Something huge. A great mass that arose on all sides of the Kelmain and made their horses rear up and snort and made the Kelmain shriek.

The stuff was like flesh and it had grown so high that the whole Kelmain Host could not be seen.

Then the substance began to fold in

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over the Kelmain and Elric heard a sound such as none he had heard before.

It was a voice.

A voice of a hundred thousand men all facing an identical terror, all dying an identical death.

It was a moan of desperation, of hopelessness, of fear.

But it was a moan so loud that it shook the walls of Castle Kaneloon.

Night fell and the Noose of Flesh tightened around the Kelmain Host, crushing all but a few horses which had run free as the sorcery began to work. It crushed Prince Umbda, who spoke no language known in the Young Kingdoms, who had come to conquer from beyond World's Edge. It crushed Theleb K'aarna, who had sought, for the sake of his love for a wanton Queen, to conquer the world. It crushed all the warriors of that near-human race, the Kelmain.

Then it absorbed them. Then it flickered and dissolved and was dust again.

No piece of flesh—man or beast—remained. But over the snow was scattered clothing, arms, armour, siege engines, riding accoutrements, coins, belt-buckles, for as far as the eye could see.

Myshella nodded to herself. "That was the Noose of Flesh," she said. "I think you for bringing it to me, Elric. I thank you, also, for finding the stone which revived me. I thank you for saving Lormyr."

There was a weariness on Elric now. He turned away, shivering.

Snow had begun to fall again.

"Thank me for nothing, Lady Myshella. What I did was for myself alone. I have destroyed Theleb K'aarna. The rest was incidental."

Moonglum darted Myshella a sceptical look and she smiled slightly.

Elric entered the castle and began to descend the steps to the hall.

"Wait," Myshella said. "This castle is magical. It reflects the desires of any who enters—should I wish it."

Elric rubbed at his eyes. "Then plainly we have no desires."

"None?" she said.

He looked at her directly. He frowned. "Your own appearance . . ."

She spread her hands. "Do not ask too many questions of me." She made another gesture. "Now. See. This castle becomes what you most desire."

And Elric looked about him, his eyes widening, and he began to scream, and fell to his knees in terror, sobbing and pleading with her.

"No, Myshella! No. I do not desire this!"

Hastily she made a sign.

Moonglum helped his friend to his feet. "What was it? What did you see?"

Elric straightened his back and rested his hand on his sword and said grimly and quietly to Myshella. "Lady, I would kill you for that if I did not understand you sought only to please me. Know this, Elric cannot have what he desires most. What he desires does not exist. What he desires is dead. All Elric has is sorrow, guilt, malice, hatred. This is all he deserves and all he will ever desire."

She put her hands to her own face and walked back to the room where he had first seen her. Elric followed.

(Continued on page 37)

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DJINN BOTTLE BLUES

JOHN BRUNNER

Jazz fantasies, for some reason, seem to be not only hard to write but impossible to sell. Perhaps because jazz is itself an unfortunately esoteric taste in these days of electrified rock—and perhaps also because those editors who do like jazz seem rarely to like fantasy stories as well. Nonetheless, every now and then someone writes a jazz fantasy anyway—usually as a labor of love—hoping that eventually it will find a home for publication. John Brunner is an old traditional jazz, skiffle and folk-music fan, and it was perhaps inevitable that he would write a story around two old loves. This editor also happens to be fond of jazz (he once wrote a jazz fantasy himself, with Terry Carr), and he likes the following story just fine . . .

NOW THE THING to remember about records by Blind Willie Dunn and his Gin Bottle Four is that Blind Willie Dunn wasn't necessarily there at the time. Sometimes he was, and sometimes he wasn't and it was Hoagy Carmichael. Don't ask me to account for this. Just bear it in mind.

What was that? Oh! No, friend, you're wrong. I am *not* drunk. Not yet. I'm doing my best and with luck I'll get there soon, and after what I've been through this morning, sober as a judge, it'll be a relief to see some nice homely pink elephants. Have the next one on me, and I'll tell you all about it.

Crazy, did you say? Well, you may be nearer the mark there. I guess anyone rates as crazy who has a wife and family and threw over a good job as a journalist to be a full-time jazz-band leader.

Yes, that's right: I'm Tommy Caxton. At least, I was when I got up today. Things have happened since then, and the world isn't the straightforward place I thought it was yesterday. Come to that, I'm not sure about yesterday any longer . . . Ah! That's better. Same again, Miss, only doubles this time!

Where was I? Oh, yes. There really was a gutbucket quartet called "Blind Willie Dunn's Gin Bottle Four," about forty years ago, and it's quite true that on some of the records issued under that name Mr. Dunn wasn't. Moral: things are not what they seem. I hope. Because if they are what they seem it would be absolutely *unbearable* . . .

Don't rush me! I am coming to the point, eventually! Look—uh—you recognised me, didn't you? Yes? So you hang around the jazz scene a bit? Yes? So maybe you know a cat called Phil Darcy. Round-faced, with glasses. Big smile. Well-dressed. Always has a bunch of weird characters in tow like spiritualists, or nowadays it's more likely hippie poets or artists who produce their pictures by dipping their feet

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in paint and dancing the reggae over a canvas stretched out on the floor. That's Phil Darcy's scene in—not to put too fine a point on it—a nutshell.

But he's got a keen commercial mind when he puts it in gear. If you haven't heard of Phil himself, you must at least have heard of this independent record company he's been running for the past couple of years. Apparently he figured he was spending so much time around jazz clubs and rock clubs and Asian music clubs and all like that, he might as well make some profit on the side. So now he manages this limited-edition outfit called Unique Records.

Right. I was pretty sure you'd recognise the name. He was the man who discovered Luke Quantum, the physicist who recites atomic formulae to cool jazz, and Sonia Jane who plays the electronic harp with her toes, and—hell, you know the people I mean. But I had to get that across first, because it mainly began with Phil Darcy.

Likewise it sort of began with my clarinetist, Louis Ditton. Louie's a hell of a fine hornman, but he does have this streak of ham in him, and he likes to cook up these corny comedy routines. Well, a few weeks ago we were doing a session down the Big Top Club. Been there? The one that's all painted with stripes to look like deck-chair canvas, and a stuffed elephant on its hind legs by the bandstand?

Yup: that's the place. They have this two-band deal three nights a week, and we were due to go on for the second set at the end of the interval, and everyone gets back on the stand but no sign of Louis. I figured he'd got involved in the back room with his girl Cindy that he's been with for years and they can't make up their minds about each other and keep splitting and splicing, splitting and splicing, like—Ah, that doesn't matter. Louie didn't show, that's my point.

So there I was fuming like Mount Etna, waiting three minutes, five, eight—sent someone around to look for him, no soap, went on waiting, until the audience got so narked I decided to do something with just Alf Reardon on trombone and the rhythm section. Which we did, me thinking the whole time about what I was going to do by way of pinning back Louie's ears.

Only, come the last chorus of the number, I hear these hoots of laughter, most of them from the boys in the band. Seems he'd fixed all this up without telling me but with everyone else in on the act. Marches out to the stand, solemn as could be, carrying this laundry-basket he dug out from somewhere. He's put brown makeup on his face and hands—that was Cindy's—and taken one of the towels from the gent's and twisted it round his head in a kind of turban.

Comes out, parks this basket on the floor, sits down cross-legged on the front of the stand, and starts making these weird Indian noises on his horn. That's when I dug that the rest of the boys were in the secret, because they fell right in with him doing this kooky comedy routine. Sort of "In a Persian Market Garden," if you get me.

Well, the audience out front were killing themselves with laughter, so when I got over worrying about someone reporting us to the Race Relations Board I sort of sighed and started rid-

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ing along on my trumpet with the others. Very simple chord pattern, just a prettied-up blues. And it was all good clean fun after all.

That is, until Phil Darcy horned—horned? No, not exactly horned. More sort of *drummed* in on the deal. See, he was right there in front of the stand which is where he always is except when he's at the bar. And he reaches out and grabs hold of this guitar belonging to a guy in the other band, which he'd left propped up against the piano. Then he turns it over and starts to beat out a—a what? Arabian, I guess—anyway, a pretty fair double-hand-to-hand rhythm. I didn't know Phil had any musical talent at all, but this wasn't bad in its way. Made a good fit with those wailing noises Louie was forcing out.

So we got to the end, and the audience yelled and clapped, and we went back to our regular programme for the rest of the set. But then, when the main band had taken over again and we'd gone to the bar to tank up, comes Phil to corner me wearing a speculative look in his eye.

Right then and there was when I should have seen trouble on the way. But the evening had gone so well, I didn't realise. I just offered him a drink and said I didn't know he played anything at all, so why didn't he go buy a set of bongoes because if that was a fair sample we'd heard tonight he ought to make out on them pretty well.

So he says he's been taking lessons from someone, and then brushes the subject aside in favour of a proposition he wants to put to me. Turns out that some of the limited-edition records he's been making have done so well, he's thinking of launching a commercial label alongside Unique. What about working up this phoney Oriental routine of Louie's into a couple of three-minute numbers back-to-back on a forty-five?

So I have to say whoa, hold your horses, because the band is under contract to Blazon Records which is a company inside one of the big combines and I have no desire to be sued for a million quid. But Phil argues no, the record can be made under a phoney name, and if it does at all well he can make like he did with Luke Quantum and sub-contract the rights to the big corporation later on.

That so-and-so has a very persuasive tongue. In fifteen minutes flat he'd sold us the notion of doing the session, just for a giggle, and we'd started wondering where we could rent some Chinese bells for Fats Hamilton, the drummer.

So ANYWAY, I straighten everything out with our manager, and this very morning as ever was we go to this private studio of Phil's which he's fixed up just around the corner from here. Beautiful acoustics, not big enough for anything over a seven-piece band, but fine for a small group. Right in his own basement, it is, with this very high-class Japanese stereo tape-deck and five mikes and a Steinway grand and a proper goldfish bowl for the engineer and—oh, all the trimmings. All!

Well, we get there, and all we find is Phil who says he's going to do the recording himself. We have no objections. I heard some of his work and he's a very fair sound man in a dilet-

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tante way. So he says what have you got for me, and I explain we worked up these two numbers that Louie wrote and we did like co-operative head arrangements of, and he says fine, what are they called, and I say well they're too new for us to have hung titles on but can't we think about that later, so he says yes and let's run them through.

I guess I ought to explain, by the way, that we weren't using the full band on this, because we didn't want everyone recognising us at once in case it didn't pan out. So we left out Alf on trombone and Ed on bass, figuring just me, Louie, Bill Sandler on piano and Fats on drums would give the right sort of sound. I wasn't even playing trumpet—I dug up an old baritone horn in a junk-shop the other day, that wheezes like a bad case of asthma when you use the middle valve, and with a glass tumbler for a mute it had sounded really great in rehearsal.

So anyhow, off goes Phil to the goldfish bowl and switches on, and we run through both numbers a couple of times for him to get the balance right, and he waves us to shift the mikes back and forth and in next to no time he comes out and says that's terrific, have a few minutes' breather and we'll do the actual takes, and for Chrissake give him some names to put on the tape-reels so he doesn't mix them up.

So Fats makes one or two of his regular cracks about calling them "East of Sewers" and "Blues Jumped Arabic" and like that. Matter of fact, we thought the second one was pretty good, and so did Phil. He's a great Jimmy Noone fan, and "Blues Jumped a Rabbit" is a Noone number, so we settled for it right away. But Louie said he'd be damned if he was going to let us call the other one anything to do with sewers, east of or west of or whatever, so I was all set to cut the argument short and say we'd try again later, when Phil suddenly snaps his fingers and looks all wicked and says come in the goldfish bowl and see what's there.

So we cram in, and there, standing right next to the mixing panel, is the *damnedest* great brass jar you ever saw, four feet high if it's an inch, with a big plug of clay for a stopper, and marked on that stopper so help me was the—the what-d'you-call-it? Like the *mogen David . . . The Seal of Solomon!*

Fats whistles and says what's that, so Phil explains how he found it in Egypt on a holiday cruise last summer and brought it down from upstairs. To give atmosphere to today's session, he says. Because everyone in the bazaar where he bought it swore blind it was one of the genuine bottles in which King Solly shut the djinnee before chucking them in the sea. It was supposed to have been hauled up when they were dredging the approaches to the Suez Canal.

So Louie grins at Phil and says are you thinking what I'm thinking, and he is. Right then and there the four of us are baptised: Blind Solly Munn and his Djinn Bottle Four. And the second number *has* to be "Djinn Bottle Blues."

We were laughing so much when we tried to do the first take Phil had to cut the recording and come out and tear us off a strip for wasting tape. So we made with the fulsome regrets bit, and the second time it went through but *perfect.* Not one sour note except by intention. So we didn't wait for a

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playback, we went straight ahead and put down "Blues Jumped Arabic" side by side with it, and that was pretty well flawless too.

Then Phil comes out of the goldfish bowl, smiling all mysteriously, and says now you listen.

So we listen.

And we hear ourselves, yes. But we *also* hear something that oughtn't to have been on the tape at all. More of that genuine authentic-type Oriental hand-drumming like what Phil had been laying down at the Big Top Club. It fitted in so naturally—gave the music just the right extra lift—that I'd been listening for at least half a chorus before I caught on.

There was an echoing quality to that drumming which none of the rest of the instruments had. And you just can't pick out one instrument in a small studio like that and add echo to it without adding a trace to all of them. The mikes pick up a bit from all the instruments, see?

And, anyway . . .

Where the hell was the drummer?

Which was exactly the question Fats put, five seconds before I did, and Phil chuckled and said where the hell did we think he was and pointed at the goldfish bowl. So we all trample on each other in the rush to peer in through the big glass window, and what do we see? What do you think? Isn't it obvious?

That lunatic Phil had plugged in an extra mike, and a pair of extra monitor phones, and taped them to the sides of the jar. And he'd mixed in what came out along with us.

He'd *said* he'd been having lessons recently . . .

THE REST of the band? Hell, I don't know what happened to *them.* I came straight around to this pub to pick up some Dutch courage, and I doubt if I'll be going back to Phil's till they throw me out. I guess we all scattered in different directions.

Oh, we'll get over it. It's not the first time someone dragged us into some weird kind of scene. But I tell you one thing I'm going to do when I go back and see Phil. I'm going to make him make honest musicians of us, and the hell with what the Union may think. He's going to give label credit to Blind Solly Munn and his Djinn Bottle *Five.*

And that extra touch damned well ought to make the disc a hit. Matter of fact, I'm already wondering about titles for the next session. What do you think of Djinnee with the Light Brown Hair?

—JOHN BRUNNER

(Continued from page 32)

Moonglum also made to follow but then remained where he stood.

He watched them enter the room and saw the door close.

And a little while later he heard laughter come from the room.

And the laughter sent him running through the passages, through the great hall, out of the door, into the night to seek the stables where he would feel more secure.

But he could not sleep that night, for the distant laughter still pursued him.

And the laughter continued until morning.

—MICHAEL MOORCOCK

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Progress is a wonderful thing—in only a few decades that which was once bright and new, the very height of fashion, is tarnished and forgotten, set aside in favor of the current fad or style. But some things never go entirely out of fashion; they simply adapt themselves to the times . . . as in this hauntingly evocative story about a man, his car, a deserted highway, and—

THE EXIT TO SAN BRETA

GEORGE R. R. MARTIN

Illustrated by BILLY GRAHAM

IT WAS THE HIGHWAY that first caught my attention. Up to that night, it had been a perfectly normal trip. It was my vacation, and I was driving to L.A. through the Southwest, taking my own sweet time about it. That was nothing new. I'd done it several times before.

Driving is my hobby. Or cars in general, to be precise. Not many people take the time to drive anymore. It's just too slow for most. The automobile's been pretty much obsolete since they started mass producing cheap copters back in '93. And whatever life it had left in it was knocked out by the invention of the personal gravpak.

But it was different when I was a kid. Back then, everybody had a car, and you were considered some sort of a social freak if you didn't get your driver's license as soon as you were old enough. I got interested in cars when I was in my late teens, and stayed interested ever since.

Anyway, when my vacation rolled around, I figured it was a chance to try out my latest find. It was a great car, an English sports model from the late '70s. Jaguar XKL. Not one of the classics, true, but a nice car all the same. It handled beautifully.

I was doing most of my traveling at night, as usual. There's something special about night driving. The old, deserted highways have an atmosphere about them in the starlight, and you can almost see them as they once were—vital and crowded and full of life, with cars jammed bumper to bumper as far as the eye could see.

Today, there's none of that. Only the roads themselves are left, and most of them are cracked and overgrown with weeds. The states can't bother taking care of them anymore—too many people objected to the waste of tax money. But ripping them up would be too expensive. So they just sit, year after year, slowly falling apart. Most of them are still driveable, though; they built their roads well back in the old days.

There's still some traffic. Car nuts like me, of course. And the hovertrucks. They can ride over just about

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anything, but they can go faster over flat surfaces. So they stick to the old highways pretty much.

It's kind of awesome whenever a hovertruck passes you at night. They do about two hundred or so, and no sooner do you spot one in your rear-view mirror that it's on top of you. You don't see much—just a long silver blur, and a shriek as it goes by. And then you're alone again.

Anyway, I was in the middle of Arizona, just outside San Breta, when I first noticed the highway. I didn't think much of it then. Oh, it was unusual all right, but not that unusual.

The highway itself was quite ordinary. It was an eight-lane freeway, with a good, fast surface, and it ran straight from horizon to horizon. At night, it was like a gleaming black ribbon running across the white sands of the desert.

No, it wasn't the highway that was unusual. It was its condition. At first, I didn't really notice. I was enjoying myself too much. It was a clear, cold night, and the stars were out, and the Jag was riding beautifully.

Riding *too* beautifully. That's when it first dawned on me. There were no bumps, no cracks, no potholes. The road was in prime condition, almost as if it had just been built. Oh, I'd been on good roads before. Some of them just stood up better than others. There's a section outside Baltimore that's superb, and parts of the L.A. freeway system are quite good.

But I'd never been on one this good. It was hard to believe a road could be in such good shape, after all those years without repair.

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And then there were the lights. They were all on, all bright and clear. None of them were busted. None of them were out, or blinking. Hell, none of them were even dim. The road was beautifully lighted.

After that, I began to notice other things. Like the traffic signs. Most places, the traffic signs are long gone, removed by souvenir hunters or antique collectors as a reminder of an older, slower America. No one replaces them—they aren't needed. Once in awhile you'll come across one that's been missed, but there's never anything left but an oddly shaped, rusted hunk of metal.

But this highway had traffic signs. Real traffic signs. I mean, ones you could read. Speed limit signs, when no one's observed a speed limit in years. Yield signs, when there's seldom any other traffic to yield to. Turn signs, exit signs, caution signs—all kinds of signs. And all as good as new.

But the biggest shock was the lines. Paint fades fast, and I doubt that there's a highway in America where you could still make out the white lines in a speeding car. But you could on this one. The lines were sharp and clear, the paint fresh, the eight lanes clearly marked.

Oh, it was a beautiful highway all right. The kind they had back in the old days. But it didn't make sense. No road could stay in this condition all these years. Which meant someone had to be maintaining it. But who? Who would bother to maintain a highway that only a handful of people used each year? The cost would be enormous, with no return at all.

I was still trying to puzzle it out when I saw the other car.

I had just flashed by a big red sign marking Exit 76, the exit to San Breta, when I saw it. Just a white speck on the horizon, but I knew it had to be another motorist. It couldn't be a hovertruck, since I was plainly gaining on it. And that meant another car, and a fellow aficionado.

It was a rare occasion. It's damn seldom you meet another car on the open road. Oh, there are regular conventions, like the Fresno Festival on Wheels and the American Motoring Association's Annual Trafficjam. But they're too artificial for my tastes. Coming across another motorist on the highway is something else indeed.

I hit the gas, and speeded up to around one-twenty. The Jag could do better, but I'm not a nut on speed like some of my fellow drivers. And I was picking up ground fast. From the way I was gaining, the other car couldn't have been doing better than seventy.

When I got within range, I let go with a blast on my horn, trying to attract his attention. But he didn't seem to hear me. Or at least he didn't show any sign. I honked again.

And then, suddenly, I recognized the make.

It was an Edsel.

I could hardly believe it. The Edsel is one of the real classics, right up there with the Stanley Steamer and the Model T. The few that are left sell for a rather large fortune nowadays.

And this was one of the rarest, one of those original models with the funny noses. There were only three or four like it left in the world, and those were

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not for sale at any price. An automotive legend, and here it was on the highway in front of me, as classically ugly as the day it came off the Ford assembly line.

I pulled alongside, and slowed down to keep even with it. I couldn't say that I thought much of the way the thing had been kept up. The white paint was chipped, the car was dirty, and there were signs of body rust on the lower part of the doors. But it was still an Edsel, and it could easily be restored.

I honked again to get the attention of the driver, but he ignored me. There were five people in the car from what I could see, evidently a family on an outing. In the back, a heavy-set woman was trying to control two small kids who seemed to be fighting. Her husband appeared to be soundly asleep in the front seat, while a younger man, probably his son, was behind the wheel.

That burned me. The driver was very young, probably only in his late teens, and it irked me that a kid that age should have the chance to drive such a treasure. I wanted to be in his place.

I had read a lot about the Edsel; books of auto lore were full of it. There was never anything quite like it. It was the greatest disaster the field had ever known. The myths and legends that had grown up around its name were beyond number.

All over the nation, in the scattered dingy garages and gas depots where car nuts gather to tinker and talk, the tales of the Edsel are told to this day. They say they built the car too big to fit in most garages. They say it was all horsepower, and no brake. They call it the ugliest machine ever designed by man. They retell the old jokes about its name. And there's one famous legend that when you got it going fast enough, the wind made a funny whistling noise as it rushed around that hood.

All the romance and mystery and tragedy of the old automobile was wrapped up in the Edsel. And the stories about it are remembered and retold long after its glittering contemporaries are so much scrap metal in the junkyards.

As I drove along beside it, all the old legends about the Edsel came flooding back to me, and I was lost in my own nostalgia. I tried a few more blasts on my horn, but the driver seemed intent on ignoring me, so I soon gave up. Besides, I was listening to see if the hood really did whistle in the wind.

I should have realized by then how peculiar the whole thing was—the road, the Edsel, the way they were ignoring me. But I was too enraptured to do much thinking. I was barely able to keep my eyes on the road.

I wanted to talk to the owners, of course. Maybe even borrow it for a little while. Since they were being so damned unfriendly about stopping, I decided to follow them for a bit, until they pulled in for gas or food. So I slowed and began to tail them. I wanted to stay fairly close without tailgating, so I kept to the lane on their immediate left.

As I trailed them, I remember thinking what a thorough collector the owner must be. Why, he had even taken the time to hunt up some rare,

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old style license plates. The kind that haven't been used in years. I was still mulling over that when we passed the sign announcing Exit 77.

The kid driving the Edsel suddenly looked agitated. He turned in his seat and looked back over his shoulder, almost as if he was trying to get another look at the sign we had already left behind. And then, with no warning, the Edsel swerved right into my lane.

I hit the brakes, but it was hopeless, of course. Everything seemed to happen at once. There was a horrible squealing noise, and I remember getting a brief glimpse of the kid's terrified face just before the two cars made impact. Then came the shock of the crash.

The Jag hit the Edsel broadside, smashing into the driver's compartment at seventy. Then it spun away into the guard rail, and came to a stop. The Edsel, hit straight on, flipped over on its back in the center of the road. I don't recall unfastening my seat belt or scrambling out of my car, but I must have done so, because the next thing I remember I was crawling on the roadway, dazed but unhurt.

I should have tried to do something right away, to answer the cries for help that were coming from the Edsel. But I didn't. I was still shaken, in shock. I don't know how long I lay there before the Edsel exploded and began to burn. The cries suddenly became screams. And then there were no cries.

By the time I climbed to my feet, the fire had burned itself out, and it was too late to do anything. But I still wasn't thinking very clearly. I could see lights in the distance, down the road that led from the exit ramp. I began to walk towards them.

That walk seemed to take forever. I couldn't seem to get my bearings, and I kept stumbling. The road was very poorly lighted, and I could hardly see where I was going. My hands were scraped badly once when I fell down. It was the only injury I suffered in the entire accident.

The lights were from a small cafe, a dingy place that had marked off a section of the abandoned highway as its airlot. There were only three customers inside when I stumbled through the door, but one of them was a local cop.

"There's been an accident," I said from the doorway. "Somebody's got to help them."

The cop drained his coffee cup in a gulp, and rose from his chair. "A copter crash, mister?," he said. "Where is it?"

I shook my head. "N-no. No. Cars. A crash, a highway accident. Out on the old interstate." I pointed vaguely in the direction I had come.

Halfway across the room, the cop stopped suddenly and frowned. Everybody else laughed. "Hell, no one's used that road in twenty years, you sot," a fat man yelled from the corner of the room. "It's got so many potholes we use it for a golf course," he added, laughing loudly at his own joke.

The cop looked at me doubtfully. "Go home and sober up, mister," he said. "I don't want to have to run you in." He started back towards his chair.

I took a step into the room. "Dammit, I'm telling the truth," I said, angry now more than dazed. "And I'm not

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drunk. There's been a collision on the interstate, and there's people trapped up there in. . . ." My voice trailed off as it finally struck me that any help I could bring would be far too late.

The cop still looked dubious. "Maybe you ought to go check it out," the waitress suggested from behind the counter. "He might be telling the truth. There was a highway accident last year, in Ohio somewhere. I remember seeing a story about it on 3V."

"Yeah, I guess so," the cop said at last. "Let's go, buddy. And you better be telling the truth."

We walked across the airlot in silence, and climbed into the four-man police copter. As he started up the blades, the cop looked at me and said, "You know, if you're on the level, you and that other guy should get some kind of medals."

I stared at him blankly.

"What I mean, is you're probably the only two cars to use that road in ten years. And you still manage to collide. Now that had to take some doing, didn't it?" He shook his head ruefully. "Not everybody could pull off a stunt like that. Like I said, they ought to give you a medal."

The interstate wasn't nearly as far from the cafe as it had seemed when I was walking. Once airborne, we covered the distance in less than five minutes. But there was something wrong. The highway looked somehow different from the air.

And suddenly I realized why. It was darker. Much darker. Most of the lights were out, and those that weren't were dim and flickering.

As I sat there stunned, the copter came down with a thud in the middle of a pool of sickly yellow light thrown out by one of the fading lamps. I climbed out in a daze, and tripped as I accidentally stepped into one of the potholes that pockmarked the road. There was a big clump of weeds growing in the bottom of this one, and a lot more rooted in the jagged network of cracks that ran across the highway.

My head was starting to pound. This didn't make sense. None of it made sense. I didn't know what the hell was going on.

The cop came around from the other side of the copter, a portable med sensor slung over one shoulder on a leather strap. "Let's move it," he said. "Where's this accident of yours?"

"Down the road, I think," I mumbled, unsure of myself. There was no sign of my car, and I was beginning to think we might be on the wrong road altogether, although I didn't see how that could be.

It was the right road, though. We found my car a few minutes later, sitting by the guard rail on a pitch black section of highway where all the lights had burnt out. Yes, we found my car all right.

Only there wasn't a scratch on it. And there was no Edsel.

I remember the Jaguar as I had left it. The windshield shattered. The entire front of the car in ruins. The right fender smashed up where it had scraped along the guard rail. And here it was, in mint condition.

The cop, scowling, played the med sensor over me as I stood there staring at my car. "Well, you're not drunk," he said at last, looking up. "So I'm not

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going to run you in, even though I should. Here's what you're going to do, mister—you're going to get in that relic, and turn around, and get out of here as fast as you can. 'Cause if I *ever* see you around here again, you might have a real accident. Understand?"

I wanted to protest, but I couldn't find the words. What could I say that would possibly make sense? Instead, I nodded weakly. The cop turned with disgust, muttering something about practical jokers, and stalked back to his copter.

When he was gone, I walked up to the Jaguar and felt the front of it incredulously, feeling like a fool. But it was real. And when I climbed in and turned the key in the ignition, the engine rumbled reassuringly, and the headlights speared out into the darkness. I sat there for a long time before I finally swung the car out into the middle of the road, and made a U turn.

The drive back to San Breta was long and rough. I was constantly bouncing in and out of potholes. And thanks to the poor lighting and the treacherous road conditions, I had to keep my speed at a minimum.

The road was lousy. There was no doubt about that. Usually I went out of my way to avoid roads that were this bad. There was too much chance of blowing a tire.

I managed to make it to San Breta without incident, taking it slow and easy. It was two a.m. before I pulled into town. The exit ramp, like the rest of the road, was cracked and darkened. And there was no sign to mark it.

I recalled from previous trips through the area that San Breta boasted a large hobbyist garage and gas depot, so I headed there and checked my car with a bored young night attendant. Then I went straight to the nearest motel. A night's sleep, I thought, would make everything make sense.

But it didn't. I was every bit as confused when I woke up in the morning. More so, even. Now something in the back of my head kept telling me the whole thing had been a bad dream. I swatted down that tempting thought out of hand, and tried to puzzle it out.

I kept puzzling through a shower and breakfast, and the short walk back to the gas depot. But I wasn't making any progress. Either my mind had been playing tricks on me, or something mighty funny had been going on last night. I didn't want to believe the former, so I made up my mind to investigate the latter.

The owner, a spry old man in his eighties, was on duty at the gas depot when I returned. He was wearing an old-fashioned mechanic's coverall, a quaint touch. He nodded amiably when I checked out the Jaguar.

"Good to see you again," he said. "Where you headed this time?"

"L.A. I'm taking the interstate this time."

His eyebrows rose a trifle at that. "The interstate? I thought you had more sense than that. That road's a disaster. No way to treat a fine piece of machinery like that Jaguar of yours."

I didn't have the courage to try to explain, so I just grinned weakly and let him go get the car. The Jag had been washed, checked over, and gassed up. It was in prime shape. I took a

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quick look for dents, but there were none to be found.

"How many regular customers you get around here?" I asked the old man as I was paying him. "Local collectors, I mean, not guys passing through."

He shrugged. "Must be about a hundred in the state. We get most of their business. Got the best gas and the only decent service facilities in these parts."

"Any decent collections?"

"Some," he said. "One guy comes in all the time with a Pierce-Arrow. Another fellow specializes in the forties. He's got a really fine collection. In good shape, too."

I nodded. "Anybody around here own an Edsel?" I asked.

"Hardly," he replied. "None of my customers have that kind of money. Why do you ask?"

I decided to throw caution on the road, so to speak. "I saw one last night on the road. Didn't get to speak to the owner, though. Figured it might be somebody local."

The old man's expression was blank, so I turned to get into the Jag. "Nobody from around here," he said as I shut the door. "Must've been another guy driving through. Funny meeting him on the road like that, though. Don't often get—"

Then, just as I was turning the key in the ignition, his jaw dropped about six feet. "Wait a minute!" he yelled. "You said you were driving on the old interstate. You saw an Edsel on the interstate?"

I turned the motor off again. "That's right," I said.

"Christ," he said. "I'd almost forgotten, it's been so long. Was it a white Edsel? Five people in it?"

I opened the door and got out again. "Yeah," I said. "Do you know something about it?"

The old man grabbed my shoulders with both hands. There was a funny look in his eyes. "You just saw it?," he said, shaking me. "Are you sure that's all that happened?"

I hesitated a moment, feeling foolish. "No," I finally admitted. "I had a collision with it. That is, I thought I had a collision with it. But then—" I gestured limply towards the Jaguar.

The old man took his hands off me, and laughed. "Again," he muttered. "After all these years."

"What do you know about this?" I demanded. "What the hell went on out there last night?"

He sighed. "C'mon," he said. "I'll tell you all about it."

"It was over forty years ago," he told me over a cup of coffee in a cafe across the street. "Back in the '70s. They were a family on a vacation outing. The kid and his father were taking shifts behind the wheel. Anyway, they had hotel reservations at San Breta. But the kid was driving, and it was late at night, and somehow he missed his exit. Didn't even notice it.

"Until he hit Exit 77, that is. He must've been really scared when he saw that sign. According to people who knew them, his father was a real bastard. The kind who'd give him a real hard time over something like that. We don't know what happened, but they figure the kid panicked. He'd only had his license about two weeks. Of all

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things, he tried to make a U turn and head back towards San Breta.

"The other car hit him broadside. The driver of that car didn't have his seat belt on. He went through the windshield, hit the road, and was killed instantly. The people in the Edsel weren't so lucky. The Edsel turned over and exploded, with them trapped inside. All five were burned to death."

I shuddered a little as I remembered the screams from the burning car. "But that was forty years ago, you said. How does that explain what happened to me last night?"

"I'm getting to that," the old man said. He picked up a donut, dunked it into his coffee, and chewed on it thoughtfully. "Next thing was about two years later," he said at last. "Guy reported a collision to the cops. Collision with a Edsel. Late at night. On the interstate. The way he described it, it was an instant replay of the other crash. Only, when they got out there, his car wasn't even dented. And there was no sign of the other car.

"Well, that guy was a local boy, so it was dismissed as a publicity stunt of some sort. But then, a year later, still another guy came in with the same story. This time he was from the east, couldn't possibly have heard of the first accident. The cops didn't know what to make of it.

"Over the years it happened again and again. There were a few things common to all the incidents. Each time it was late at night. Each time the man involved was alone in his car, with no other cars in sight. There were never any witnesses, as there had been for the first crash, the real one. All the collisions took place just beyond Exit 77, when the Edsel swerved and tried to make a U turn.

"Lots of people tried to explain it. Hallucinations, somebody said. Highway hypnosis, claimed somebody else. Hoaxes, one guy argued. But only one explanation ever made sense, and that was the simplest. The Edsel was a ghost. The papers made the most of that. 'The haunted highway', they called the interstate."

The old man stopped to drain his coffee, and then stared into the cup moodily. "Well, the crashes continued right up through the years whenever the conditions were right. Until '93. And then traffic began slacking off. Less and less people were using the interstate. And there were less and less incidents." He looked up at me. "You were the first one in more than twenty years. I'd almost forgotten." Then he looked down again, and fell silent.

I considered what he had said for a few minutes. "I don't know," I said finally, shaking my head. "It all fits. But a ghost? I don't think I believe in ghosts. And it all seems so out of place."

"Not really," said the old man, looking up. "Think back on all the ghost stories you read as a kid. What did they all have in common?"

I frowned. "Don't know."

"Violent death, that's what. Ghosts were the products of murders and of executions, debris of blood and violence. Haunted houses were all places where someone had met a grisly end a hundred years before. But in twentieth century America, you didn't find the violent death in mansions and castles. You found it on the highways, the bloodstained highways where thou-

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sands died each year. A modern ghost wouldn't live in a castle or wield an axe. He'd haunt a highway, and drive a car. What could be more logical?"

It made a certain amount of sense. I nodded. "But why this highway? Why this car? So many people died on the roads. Why is this case special?"

The old man shrugged. "I don't know. What made one murder different from another? Why did only some produce ghosts? Who's to say. But I've heard theories. Some said the Edsel is doomed to haunt the highway forever because it is, in a sense, a murderer. It caused the accident, caused those deaths. This is a punishment."

"Maybe," I said doubtfully. "But the whole family? You could make a case that it was the kid's fault. Or even the father's, for letting him drive with so little experience. But what about the rest of the family? Why should they be punished?"

"True, true," the old man said. "I never bought that theory myself. I've got my own explanation." He looked me straight in the eye.

"I think they're lost," he said.

"Lost?" I repeated, and he nodded.

"Yes," he said. "In the old days, when the roads were crowded, you couldn't just turn around when you missed an exit. You had to keep going, sometimes for miles and miles, before you could find a way to get off the road and then get back on. Some of the cloverleafs they designed were so complicated you might never find your way back to your exit.

"And that's what happened to the Edsel, I think. They missed their exit, and now they can't find it. They've got to keep going. Forever." He sighed. Then he turned, and ordered another cup of coffee.

We drank in silence, then walked back to the gas depot. From there, I drove straight to the town library. It was all there, in the old newspapers on file. The details of the original accident, the first incident two years later, and the others, in irregular sequence. The same story, the same crash, over and over. Everything was identical, right down to the screams.

The old highway was dark and unlit that night when I resumed my trip. There were no traffic signs or white lines, but there were plenty of cracks and potholes. I drove slowly, lost in thought.

A few miles beyond San Breta I stopped and got out of the car. I sat there in the starlight until it was nearly dawn, looking and listening. But the lights stayed out, and I saw nothing.

Yet, around midnight, there was a peculiar whistling sound in the distance. It built quickly, until it was right on top of me, and then faded away equally fast.

It could have been a hovertruck off over the horizon somewhere, I suppose. I've never heard a hovertruck make that sort of noise, but still, it might have been a hovertruck.

But I don't think so.

I think it was the wind whistling through the nose of a rusty white ghost car, driving on a haunted highway you won't find on any road maps. I think it was the cry of a little lost Edsel, searching forever for the exit to San Breta.

—GEORGE R. R. MARTIN

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DEATH CARD

KEN McCULLOUGH

Illustrated by MIKE NALLY

Ken McCullough tells us he is "27, M.F.A. from Writers Workshop, Univ. of Iowa, and teaches at Montana State University (a drag)." His poetry has been published in thirty magazines, five anthologies and his own collection, The Easy Wreckage. *He's been writing fiction for the last two years, his most recent stories published (or to be published) in* Again, Dangerous Visions, *Richard Gehman's* Larger Than Life, *and* The Iowa Review. *After reading the story below, you may agree with us that he is the find of the year.*

Remarks in the beginning of June about the peculiar "black" clouds that were coming from the west and for some peculiar reason remained "stuck," as it were, over Organon were frequent . . . we were under the impression that the DOR-clouds coming from the west originated from atomic blasts in the western United States. However, it was later ascertained that there were no atomic detonations in the USA in March, 1952. Thus, the origin of the DOR-clouds remains a mystery to this date. The onset of the disaster at Organon soon after the tornado struck in the West, March 21, 1952, centered our attention on the possibility that we were dealing with some very obscure cosmic events.

—Wilhelm Reich, *Selected Writings*

JULY 27TH, 1969. Sunday. Hotter than a bitch. Michael Alexander Gillespie pulls the 24-ton Diamond-T out of the Skelley Truck Stop at the Ames Exit on 35—workshirt plastered to his back. Time 5:32 P.M. Slips in behind a semi and hauls back on the throttle—opens it up—48 m.p.h.—dogshit! Won't be home til the middle of tomorrow—home . . . the clubfoot in his rookery insanity. 27th of July 27 years old 7 days ago 27 dollar check from home nothing nothing nothing. This was going to be his second straight ninety-hour week driving a cement truck for Brownell Construction out of Sioux City. They'd finished the paving job in West Liberty and he was ferrying trucks up to LeMars—the next jobsite—327 miles away—at 48 m.p.h. Yesterday 21½ hours, passed out for an hour, gave him another truck, home to force her to give him breakfast then on his way to another 20-hour day what for what for. To pay the goddamn debts and split from this malignity. Flips on the radio—WLS—Golden Oldies:

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When you find your sweetheart
In the arms of your friend
That's . . . when your heartaches . . .
be-gin . . .

Elvis baby, I dig what you're laying on me, but *not now*. Jesus, she would just bitch her ass off if she heard a song like that. Funky Funky Speedway was all she could hack. A year next week he'd been with her, a year . . .

There she was snaked up in terror on the bed against the backdrop of the Indian print wall-hanging scarf he'd drawn the dragonfly on for her to embroider over, the curve of her hip the tiger panties her bright god so bright eyes open wide the eyes the eyes that made him the blind isinglass apeman the eyes that made him a constellation the eyes that made him a broken back that wails the eyes that drove him bats now they were open. Wide in fear. And the soft arms clutching herself those soft small perfect breasts the left one he'd named Oliver the one with the scar and he wanted to hit her and hit her but now he was on his knees sobbing the pain pressing on him swallowing him tearing apart the wet sutures of his nerve-endings the pain mocking him the pain an instinct decrepit stitched in the ear of a ghetto a disaster area him. The pain and her sphincters' wet apologies. Providing nowhere else to build. Leaving him the relative security of his hotplate. Leaving him lost in the colorless robinless sea of dust. Without her.

. . . it was a year ago next week he'd finished up his Master's, had his head neatly filed away, and was doing a little

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mindless Zen discipline known as jackhammer solo to pay off the last of his debts before it was *travel.* He had kissed the right asses and gotten his Z-Card for the Merchant Marine; travel and bread to boot and no goddamn uniforms. After that he'd have enough for a stash and would go to Italy to replace Clint Eastwood as the next strongandsilent bulletproof psychopathic hardass—such stuff are pipedreams made of. But one day after five or six boilermakers down at Connelly's with the Foremen Incorporated, he'd met her—over at the pad of Roach and Mimi, an AC-DC flowercouple where he'd shower and ofttimes knock off the old lady: "Why not *both* of us, Miguel?" And the first thing he'd mumbled to her when they were alone in the kitchen together, sounding like a cross between Brando and a hippo breaking wind, was: "Christ, you're *really* beautiful"—and dammit she was; her ankles were funny, her nose was out of line, she stood like a pregnant arthritic flamingo, and her teats were anti-American—but she was beautiful. After listening to her talk, so ensconsed in her own self-importance, he could think of only one thing: "Hang on to your balls, man." You just knew that in that old leather purse hanging from her shoulder there was a razorsharp pocketsize scimitar and a dozen or so shrunken testicles. Boose was no excuse. He never should have said it. He avoided her for about two weeks until one wiped-out (as usual) balmy evening there she was in Connelly's and he couldn't pass it up, he couldn't deny that old root swelling up in his Wranglers! She was there with her present drone-in-captivity who couldn't have been more distracted and she didn't even give the cat the time of the month. Up sidles Gillespie and before he knows what's happened she says she's got her own pad now and would he build her some shelves since he is the big strong constructioneer.

Well, the following evening they'd gotten the lumber, and after a Black Russian each and a joint of Gold, he moved in that night to stay. The shelves got built three weeks later, his two dogs ran away, and the porch on his river-cabin retreat had caved in. He'd copped-out to the White Goddess, or was it copped-in? . . . that's what he didn't know. From the very first night she *really* had him by the balls, saying "Yes" when he knew "No," and "No" when "Yes" was it, exposing every whimpering flaw in his facade; the myth he had created of himself, the myth that all the others saw and knew, the myth of the gentle woodsman disguised as a grizzly who always carried the smell of his Warm Morning No. 520 pot-belly with him in his fur wherever he went, the myth that had prompted a friend to write of him in a poem "There is a man whose name means:/Waiting like a mountain for the birds to return." She drew him in smaller and smaller in his own eyes to the state in which he now bungled along—a state in which he had all the patience and open-mindedness of a cornered rapid shrew or some mongoloid fang from the Jurassic. Each day smaller more petty more threatened. And each day *her* ego-trip snowballed, grasping and assimilating everything she touched without even stopping to

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refuel—except on him. She was . . . inhuman. *Threatened* was the word—Michael Alexander Gillespie was so threatened that he doubted the validity of everything he had ever known. It wasn't some kind of post-adolescent *angst,* it was the feeling that what he was was a throwback, something existing out of its time and place, a mutant, doomed to extinction, something obsolete. He knew he was a criminal, a fugitive—who had the need for very much isolation within himself, but she would allow him none. She would say "The Piscean Age; the Age of the Fish; the Christian Age is over, love. The Aquarian Age; the Pagan Scene is here to stay, so you'd just better learn to swing with it." Every film book play rag and mag blared it out, drove it in, turned it: "turn on, freak out, be One with the Universe, be a goddamn quivering blob of climaxing protoplasm—only then will the cup be taken from you, baby." The simple equation NO BRAIN NO PAIN. She would flex a *Playboy* and say "Ginsberg says here that unless a man has experienced the anal sphincter-prostate orgasm he will never completely understand a woman" and then that look of subtle bitchy triumph on her face. Rage hostility and verbal violence were the only comebacks he could come up with. He could not even get stoned with her anymore. Watching her in action, watching her with other people, other guys, watching her drifting off into some sort of wild Dionysian ecstasy, left him in cold terror screaming inside for her to come back. And then the hallucinations, the malarial nightmares, and the words that came out of his mouth that he couldn't control. He'd never really known what a "mind-fuck" was before, but this was it. Everything about her that he feared and suspected was happening, with a little bit of help from the weed. But it was all in his *mind.* He knew that. And he knew that somehow she was right; that she was more of a whole person than he was. She was pretty screwed-up by straight standards, but who gives a shit about *those* standards? It was this whole sensitivity bit—if she was *sensitive* she figured there was no reason why she shouldn't sleep with other cats, because she still loved him as the King Cat. But she thought that his reasons for wanting to sleep with other chicks were something less than hip; it was "strictly male chauvinist double-standard 1940's self-gratification," so she couldn't go along with them. He got to feeling like some kind of primordial *clutz*—she'd make him step on injured grasshoppers, take mice away from Barrymore, pick up worms off the sidewalk when it was raining and put them back in the dirt, she would trip him when he was about to accidentally step on an anthill, and she would lay into him every time he would do his impersonation of his wimp limp acidfreak deadhead friends, saying that he ought to tell them to their faces what he *really* thought of them instead of pretending to be their friends, and she would if he didn't. "Contempt" was his rule of thumb, and sociopath was his label.

And it went on and on and round and round. It reached the point where he couldn't go anywhere and trust her. Not that she had *done* anything—it was

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just that he felt the *potential* there saying "just let me loose you sonofabitch and I'll turn on every man woman and child I can set my hot pumping labials on." He could see her with all their marks on her shaking her stuff flaunting it in front of them the way she always did when they danced all wanting all taking all getting burned when her eyes rolled back her teeth flashed the spittle hung in the corners of her open lips and her body there to be used by any who wanted it—and who could resist.

Then one evening in late May he said "Yes" again and it was the start of something he couldn't handle at all; the balance shifted completely.

"Michael, I'm over at Roach and Mimi's . . . it's their last night in town, you know . . . are you coming over?"

He knew that she'd made it with Roach once before they were together and he knew by the way she acted around him that she desperately wanted to make it with the cat again. This Roach was more of a chick than a guy and you couldn't apply the word "pussywhipped" to him because that was exactly the treatment he needed and got from Mimi who was the former generalissimo of a chain of bull-dikes strung out from Chicago to New York. But she *was* into a pretty heavy occult thing. And maybe she did have powers, maybe she was psychic. If she was she'd be able to read his bluff . . . anyway . . .

"Look, you know I don't want to come over, it's just too much hassle, but do you want to stay awhile?"

And then he said it; the least of all possible things that he wanted, and he knew exactly what her answer would be:

"Why don't you spend the night over there with them . . ."

"Do you *really* mean that . . . this is quite a switch . . . What made you change your mind?"

Of course I don't mean it, bitch "Well, it's their last night in town and you may never see them again . . ."

"I'll need my diaphragm, my toothbrush, and my nightgown."

. . . God, Scott, what have I done. She is over there with both those goddamn scumsuckers in there in their circus touching tongue to pulsing hole. If she is not back here by four o'clock I am going over there . . . or over to Jeanne's . . .

. . . she went through with it. I've been going just crazy. No food for three days. There were about five gallons left over from that keg I told you about and I've been drinking it at the rate of about a gallon of the stale shit a day left with that grain you left with us. If I were sober I'd kill somebody probably myself. Man, what am I doing? I left a turd in her bed that night when she came home, I made her tell me exactly what happened over there and then I spit in her face. I've been sleeping downstairs and last night I almost killed one of the pups with the ax while chopping wood drunk in the dark. Man, what do I do now? . . .

"What you do is get rid of her, the way you should have right in the beginning, you jerk" was the consensus

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without one dissenting vote, but . . . it never happens that way. Roach and Mimi were out of the picture now. Gillespie and Diana went to the Breadloaf Conference for Grandmas & Writers of Little or No Repute, both on fellowships, and everything seemed to cool off with the quasi-vacation atmosphere although his paranoia never really left him. He could sense (but it was just his sick imagination) the vibrations of her trying to put the make on some harmonicat they met in a bar one night, the same thing when they ran into a Don Juan buddy of his from undergrad school who was there with some kind of drama thing, and again with Richter—him most strongly; Aram Richter; a combo of Mickey Rooney and Mickey Spillane; whose charisma seemed to dominate the whole shebang—who had even sent one of *his,* Michael Alexander Gillespie's, stories to the *New American Review.* But Gillespie had to chalk up seeing all these things taking shape to his own very bad karma—*bad* was hardly a negative enough word for it. They split for home and everything seemed to be "slicker than snot on a doorknob." Then, just in this last week, a month after Breadloaf, the clown white started to flake away from the fetus of what was really there. The whole thing started to expose itself to him; what was going on behind his back—just how things *really* were.

With the shitty hours he was working he could afford to spend little time at anything but eating fucking sleeping and an occasional trip to Baskin-Robbins. He'd lined up a decent job at Texas A&I teaching freshman dolts but he figured the two of them should leave this place with a clean tab. Even then he'd have to work these obnoxious hours right up to the end of August just to break even and still have enough for a Rent-a-Truck. Then one morning last week he'd come across a letter on her blue corn-flowered stationery—a letter that was not yet sealed. It was addressed to a speedy bleached-out drama critic friend of hers in Boston. He opened it:

. . . Yes, it's certainly true that ther've been too many partings in my young sweet life, but is that a reason to continue in an intolerable situation . . . And I *like him, too. I just can't stand to live with him. Brings me down. He's a very uptight pessimistic person. Gets me to doubting my best friends. Wakes up in the morning and yells "Shit!" If somebody thanks him for something he wonders what they're up to . . .*

What more can I say? I can't see anything to do but what I'm doing . . . My mystic friend read Tarot for me yesterday. [that fucking bitch Mimi] *Astounding as usual. A young man about 30 (35) established in a profession. Economic dependence. Parting of lovers. Choice between country and city (SF) lifestyles, etc. And a very strong hint that Aram is a charlatan . . .*

Threatened was the word for it, baby, *threatened* was the word and contempt was the rule of thumb again again and again. How do you like your green-eyed son, Rosemary? The name *Aram* hit him like a ball peen hammer right where it does the most good.

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. . . that he deals in illusions, in some way, and that I might be taken in.

You believe it, Tarot? I've never seen her be wrong yet. Rather spooky. After she'd finished I drew one card from the deck. Death. Shit. Everybody just sat there in shock for about 20 seconds. But I hope I've "used it up." Barrymore caught a rabbit this morning. Baby one. It was screaming and I caught her to make her drop it. But just as I did, she chomped down, so what I got was a rabbit and a bloody hand. Enough to satisfy the Fates, I hope . . . Haven't heard from Aram what he's decided, yet. If he'll pay my way I guess I'll go out to SF and see what's happening . . . I am very close to being happy. Digging the universe.

Cruel brutal Jesus, he just wanted to run or hit or scream but it was all there strangling inside him. He could not let her know, ever, what he had read. He had to get it out of her, make her admit this whole thing, this whole conspiracy and he ran out without kneeling and kissing her on her warm savage neck as he had the other mornings as she lay there zonked out. Then he was in the cement truck just waiting for some cocksucking foreman to give him a little shit and POP the bastard would have gotten it and never known what had hit him. Then he came home that night after fourteen hours of fighting this bleeding jungle in his brainnest and the first thing she said as he walked in the door was "Michael . . . would you ever . . . *do* anything to me?" her eyes like some trapped fawn. And he fell up against her and it all came; burst in him, gagged him. He could barely get it out, snot and tears running down his cramped face: How . . . could you think that? Diana, Diana, Diana you are the last thing in the world I would ever hurt. I would . . . myself before that." This was true—he had the scars of all the other times to prove that—the scars on his hands. How can you do something to someone else for something you sat back and let happen. Then she told him what he already knew, about the Death Card, the rabbit. And the other cards—the other cards only in his own mind as that bitch Mimi turned them over for her: The Lovers, The 9 of Cups, The King of Wands, The 6 of Cups, The 4 of Pentacles, The Hanged Man and the others he knew so well and respected the truth of and here she Diana the paingoddess was using them as her sweepstake ticket, her panacea, as the key to her whole Master Plan for tearing the World a new asshole.

Then it was the next day. It rained in the afternoon. They got an early quit. She was at Group. He knew he had to find more to feed this whatever it was and he was poking through manila envelopes coat pockets anything at all, and nothing—until he felt an envelope in her neatly-folded green velvet toga. It was one of Richter's fancy envelopes:

Dear Diana . . . God, you're exquisite . . . I can react only with horror at the thought that two people who might be so perfect for each other are frittering away the years apart from each other . . . Yes, I have been looking for someone . . . and I am running out of that stuff called time . . . that picture; it hurts

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me to look at it—you're just so exquisite . . . what am I doing . . . I don't trust being outer-directed like this . . . this has never happened to me . . .

Why he didn't do something he couldn't say, but all his power was gone; limp; impotent—he was the "lame duck" she was writing about in that thinly-veiled allegory sticking out of her typewriter.

That night he called Richter not knowing really what to say, talking about markets, the whole writing con-game, etc., but Gillespie knew he was coming off over the phone like some kind of retard with his phoney confidential tone—they both obviously knew something was up. But Richter said to cool it—he never had any intention of birddogging Gillespie. This was consolation, but Diana, meanwhile was coming on more and more bitchy, not allowing him even the things in bed that he knew really turned her on. And every conversation was a brawl with her doing her banshee-dervish number and contracting instant diarrhea and heartburn.

Just as if were in the script he found the second letter in the same place: ". . . I value Mike's future too much to fuck him over like this . . . let's just forget the whole thing at this instant in time . . ." and this satisfied, this appeased for a couple of days, but he knew that she wouldn't give up at this. And then there it was in the same goddamn place as if she must have *wanted* him to find it. She had it waiting there like her knockout punch, the one she reached way back for—and she was really going to sock it to Richter—this was the killer—she had pulled out all the stops; this letter would put the screws to him to tightly that he would be absolutely powerless to tell her to fuck off: ". . . Aram, all that glitters is not deadly, etc." and with it a picture that he himself Phineas T. Gillespie had taken of her reclining on the bed looking wistfully off into Saroyan space with one of those teats half-exposed peeking out from under her arm, it looking out of the picture at you saying "I am meant for all manhood to share, baby, I am meant for *your* hands, *your* mouth, *your* lips, *your* long hungry tongue—it paralyzed you into submission, and somehow this was *right!* What in the pluperfect fucking hell was wrong with him—and he left the letter just as he had found it to wait for the reply he knew would be there. But it wasn't there—by some fortunate or unfortunate accident or by blind instinct he found it tucked in the bottom of one of her jewelry boxes just three days later:

. . . You are a very potent lady, Diana. It is rotten, I know, but my letters to you and to Mike must be mutually contradictory . . . I'd come there, but we both know how negative the vibrations would be in Iowa. Perhaps San Francisco holds the answer. At least conditions would be optimum . . . I will be here . . . let me know the earliest possible date of your arrival—do not bring Barrymore . . .

Now that it was all up front (to him, at least) it was coming in very loud and clear—forget the job at A&I, forget you Mommy and Daddy and all the

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ships at sea, forget you Rent-a-Truck, forget you Mombusho to Japan in two years, forget you Diana Shithooks, forget you Richter;

. . . keep up this kind of writing, Mike, and in a very few years you could possibly leave us all in the dust . . .

we're all in it for the same pudding pickings, man, so why try to fake it with this nobility gallantry chivalry diplomacy put-on. "It's because neither of us wanted to hurt you, Michael" she said later that day when he finally forced it out of her. Well if he came up on them in Mojo Disco six months hence them happily lapping up their wintergreen martinis and chitterlings he would feel stung then even if the hurt had died a little. Forget it, Diana, just forget it, I can't do it anymore, this game is out of my league. I used to read *True and Untrue Confetti* at the barbershop but I never thought I'd get caught in the stinking whirlpool of human excrement right at the middle of it.

So now she was coming on Gangbusters. She had out all his books—his *I Ching, Astrology for the Simple, Your Hand and Your Future,* and his Tarot deck time after time. She even had some cat come in to do up her chart, and then out came all his books on *that* trip, and she was building up steam, building up an empire of herself in her own head asking the Forces for approval for reassurance "It's me . . . here I am . . . let me at it." And now she'd begun leaving books like *Famous Faggot Geniuses* around for him to read.

This whole occult thing was coming up everywhere, and it was driving him into a frenzy of frustration. He tried to fight it with what was left of the faith he had in the other things but it was no good, he was faking-out no one—he was scared. After his rebuttals and his screw-you supercilious guffaws there was the silence, and the Southern Baptist remorse he had been steeped in, or was it "sheeped?" Through the uptight power of his reaction to this scene they could hear in his words not his laughter at them but something more like screams, screams of the Trapped, of the Creature who knows the lack of not being a Man, and when he does become a Man for a twisted agonizing instant it is not enough; he shrieks out to be Spirit. This was Michael Alexander Gillespie, wanting to fake it take it easy shuffle on down the road and he just couldn't make it that way, he had to pass the buck the baton the bid. Something was out of wack. He knew it was the World, not him, but shit, it *had* to be him. The disintegration moved in—a hand at the back of his neck now on the soft top of the back of his brain underneath his eggshell skull, and he knew it for the first time, he knew now that all those things he had read in all those medieval allegories were happening to him, this was *fear* and he was totally helpless.

And he thought back to how it always used to be so much worse with chicks and how it always seemed to get better every time, but this thing had just been too extreme—the hipsickness had welded his brain into some sort of platinum buzzard trapped-in-the-

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skin-with-only-the-eyeholes-left-to-the-outside. She was pure beauty all things soft all things warm yes she was and he loved her more than anything but the pain she brought with her could be borne by no man if he were to remain a man. Old Dylan came back to him:

I once loved a woman
A child I am told
I gave her my heart
But she wanted my soul . . .

He tried to rebuild bridges that weren't completely burned:

Dear Meredith . . . Your letter, it was good to get . . . no job prospects except the one at A&I with no writing courses . . . Unless you want to live with me and be my punching bag I see no point in even attempting that gig . . .

but he knew that he really wouldn't even consider it, couldn't.

The days went by barely subsistently with him slinking around looking for clues knifing her with words however he could and then the cement truck fourteen hours a day and he could think of nothing but the Death Card and all the voodoo ways he could get back at her by killing any of their two dogs and nine cats—some revenge that would be freaky enough to really flip her out. But it was all stacked against him he knew it. Mimi he knew now wanted Diana for *herself*—the Tarot—she had rigged it, not like card-sharks rig things, she *was* psychic, no doubt about it—she had such a human smile but behind that smile you could see the greed and utter insanity of lust for destroying—destroying men—the smile that exposed her as link in the Conspiracy of Bitches—to get back what had been usurped from them and the words of the poet Luciano Corozza stuck in his hindbrain. At a reception during the past winter Corozza had said to him that what we would get back to would be a matrilinear set-up with merry-go-round marriages. When Gillespie had heard this he went mildly wildly buggy for a couple of days and there was Diana right at his side with big eyes eyeing Corozza, eyeing every other thing in pants who just happened to be there, eyeing the free-form marriage with Men. The smooth Egyptian lovemouth opening as delicately as a flower into a dripping scarlet ring of teeth to swallow all men and the raga of her womb lulling you into her. There would be nothing more than the fuselage of the carcass left when she finished with Malekind. But if he knew that he were to do *himself* in, this would be exactly what Mimi wanted and wished for with her Death Card. And then it started to get him, slowly. Milstrom, the timekeeper, said to him back at the plant one day "Gillespie, when you have an accident, who do you want us to notify?" Not "in the event"—that is not what the dude had said—he had said "when;" that old black paranoia began to weave its spell. So he gave them his father's name, not Diana's. Driving that huge fucking truck flat out after all that had happened made him so hyperaware that he seemed to have 360° vision—for the two-year-old on the tricycle, for the old man with his dog. Then they told him the job at West

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Liberty was kaput; fini, and it would be LeMars—he would be away from her, 327 miles away, for the rest of the summer, to let this thing come to a head and then drain off before he returned to make the final schism. So they gave him the rest of the day off.

Picked up two sixpax of Label, *watermelon from Steffo. Ring the cowbell—nothing—predictable. Note under the mailbox: "Modelling at Haley's farm, will probably be gone for awhile. Dinner in the oven. Love, Diana" Bullshit. Modelling, my ass. Barrymore you pregnant bitch how are you: just like all the other queen bees, hunh. Patchouli all over. In the hamper, on the towels, on the couch, everywhere. Your womanscent wind from Persian alleys. That follows me that clings to my clothes my skin. Other people know me by it in a room—when I am there: "It's the Potato Cellar Man!" Shower. Two beers. Put on the sides you left out: the new* String Band, *Billy Walker, Good the Bad the Ugly. Full-time hardon from all that vibration in the truck. Just like buses, subways. Never fails. Read in some skin mag P.T. Boats in W.W. II made the cats sterile. Wonder if Kennedy's chromosomes got fucked-up and that's why they had so many problems having kids. Dubious. Speaking of female chauvinists. Yank out light fixture—fish for hash, light it smoke it—pleasant buzz. Homemade lasagna. The strange salad—about enough for a dieting dormouse. Bring on the gruel scallopini with the wheat germ gravy! Fastest way to a Cancer's heart is through his belly—she should know that by now. Two more beers. Two more beers. Walker on that Kristoffer-son song. If she could only dig anything really* down *she might be able to get her goddamn perfect fanny out of high gear with this sensitivity and awareness bit and realize just how goddamn selfish she really is. Two hours. No game on the tube. Shit if she's modelling . . . those cats are such weak sticks how can she even stand to be around them. Haley's so weak he couldn't pull a limber dick out of a tub of lard. Same as Roach. How why does what does she see in this incredible bunch of losers. I'll just find out. One more beer.*

Roach and Mimi's freak van—Christ, I didn't know they were around again. J'sus I'm wiped out. If I can talk to Mimi and just try to ask her sensibly if she will keep her goddamn hands off what's not up for grabs. Talk to Roach out of the question. What . . . do I think I own the chick . . . that thing that Peters said last week: "If they're going to get raped, so what? Why should they treat their cunts as if it were private property." Marxism by the rules. Well shit, since I'm primed might as well assert myself before . . . Kids watching Three Stooges. *Up the stairs. Two at a time. Shankar at 200 decibels. High pitched humming incantation. Must be doing mesc again. Knock three times. Try the handle open what in the holy shit I don't can't won't refuse to . . . Roach with this huge hardon. Just coming up off her. Mimi with those lost eyes coming up off her too. Haley jacking off in the corner in a chair headband zits. Her with those eyes Roach with those faggoty eyes mauling the inside of my head then Roach does it with this Capote voice: "Mike, isn't there something we can do for you. Won't you at least try? We can*

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give you so much if you'd just try . . ." The window the glass. Wedges glistening in the blood the hand locking running from it all my god my god why hast thou let me be the one again and again.

So she was lost. For good I know it. But when you know black is white you don't accept you don't and you turn up several years later lost underneath the Biltmore clock in your toosmall teeshirt saying "and you never really existed."

The very next morning he made his first run to LeMars, his head feeling like a pinball machine wired up to an electric chair. The only thing that kept him together, kept him just spaced out enough after all that had happened, were the clouds; the old Hamletian metamorphoses. The sky that evening—it was rose it was lavender it was blue it was gray it was black. And through the high whirr of disappointment and empty-future-thoughts he noticed one huge cloud which seemed to stretch from a point just to his left in the sky all the way to the horizon. It was God. His beard was white and Michelangesque but his face was cruelty; hooded eyelids and John L. Lewis brows were the prominent features. His left hand was splayed outward acting maybe as some kind of rudder to arrest his forward motion. The hand was black. The right arm was raised ready to strike. It was black also but the poised hand was not a hand—it was a bird's head with a hooked beak and the eyes of the coldest of killers. He watched the cloud as he drove. It was to his left and since the road was very straight he could drive without very much fear of losing control of the truck while he was watching the cloud. At first this was the only cloud of its size, but as he drove others came, mottled, darkly. Most of them seemed as if they were part of a school of clouds with the same coloration, the same-shaped heads, the bodies in the same positions. They all seemed to be grotesque deities lolling on their backs. On one cloud he saw what he thought to be a very wooly penis, but when he looked more closely he saw that it was a very fat cherubic figure with its back to Gillespie and it was hunched over the deity's privates—going down on him. Then as he neared the outskirts of Pocahontas, he saw it just ahead. The black cloud. It looked like the underside of a huge jellyfish. He could not tell how big it was only that he was going to be under it. Shortly. It filled his entire range of vision. Moving very slowly in a circular pattern. Every now and then it would tremble as if some internal tremor had forced the energy to the outer layer of whatever such clouds are made of. It circled not more than one hundred feet up, and occasionally a wispy black strand would snaggle down abruptly and touch the ground. He had never seen one before but he knew this was one of them, and he Michael G. was immediately under it and there was no escape. This was a tornado. This was the Death Card, Mimi, this was the Death Card, Diana, this was it sportsfans and he knew it. He drove on, as only one who is waiting for the hit of the stalker the sniper, poised for the shock of the 24-ton truck being jerked up into the funnel. And then the rain started, and all traffic stopped, but he drove on. He'd heard some-

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where that you should angle your vehicle *into* the wind when a tornado is in the area, but he drove on, the rain now spearing in through the crack at the top of the window on the other side of the cab, the window which wouldn't go up all the way. It was stinging the right side of his face. But he drove on. The wind picked up and "buffeting" was babyshit compared to what it was doing to him—the wheel that was usually as tight as a nun's cunt was whipping around like somebody had cut the nerves. And now he was the only thing moving—he could barely see the dotted line—moving as if he were some wingwalking fool flaunting himself and he thought of how they worked how there was never any pattern; an outhouse here, a prize bull there, the factory down the road, and he knew that just one small cement truck moving down below would not go unnoticed—it was as if he were banking on the out-and-out baldheaded arrogance of what he was doing—the throttle all the way out. Then he could see. And there were other cars moving. He was out of it. The cornfields as he passed them, the wheat fields, were completely laid out; twisted by some insane Indian terrorgod carrying out a primeval prophecy of revenge. As he pulled through the intersection of 71 he saw a tank truck on its side; the landscape was the same all the way to LeMars.

That night hammering along with his lift back, Gilder, the berrybrown snagtoothed C&W groaner from Wheeling, Gillespie looked out the window to his right and saw it; his planet, the Moon, the same planet that a week before, exactly a week almost to the minute, he had seen human beings meandering slowmotion around on. A week ago, his own very own birthday. He poked Gilder, motioned with his head and hollered over the semi roar "Christ . . . talk about a long haul" and was asleep the next minute with the smile still on his face.

And then the sun was up and it was West Liberty and an hour of blast furnace Russian Army-mouthed so-called sleep on the front seat until Hogbody the foreman with his fourday bristle crop was breathing stale whisky and coffee fumes on him growling "Getcha ass up, Slippery . . . take 124 and getthefuck outta here if ya 'spect the eagle ta even fart atcha this week" so he was in gear—rolling—up the lane with the dogs freaking out forced her to get out of the rack and fix him French toast sausage Maxwell House laced with honey and V-8 and he was back at it barrelassing down the Interstate.

As he turned north the signs started—O's Gold, Trojan, Sweet Lassy, Felco, Hy-Line, Vitamino, Hulting, Pfister, Funk's, Pioneer, Full-o-Pep, Kent, Yoder—feeds and seeds feeds and seeds feeds and seeds—it was the Midwest, baby, you'd better believe it. And at every rest area a row of plastic 9 to 5'ers with their lilywhite broods in Airstreams with chopped and channeled Owens cabincruisers in tow—on the way to the nearest (or farthest) manmade mini-ocean. The only thing that saved it for him was the fields—the pastels; Disney yellows and greens—fields that made you realize that a guy like Grant Wood looked

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through the only eyes this place could possibly have socketed into his brain. But Christ it was hot! As he moved along he could see the heat rising from the blacktop in front of him . . . but there was a strange thing going on with the light—it was fading, the greens and the yellows were washing out. It was the middle of the afternoon with not a single cloud anywhere in sight and the light was dying for no reason. Outside the cab he could hear nothing—not even his engine, not even his tires. There was no sound, as if he were deaf as if there was no life out there as if he riding in that cement truck was being ferried along in a vacuum, a vacuole within the reality of what was outside him. The trees, the barns, the houses, the silos, the poles and the grazing animals seemed to be pushed against the surface of the land, as if some force, if it were to be removed from this place, would cause all the objects to disappear into some sort of terrible howling vertigo . . . of silence. Now everything was merely in silhouette; the landscape was nothing more than a yellowed snapshot from someone else's childhood. He drove on. From the northeast there were low wispy clouds shooting by him at ground level and still this silence. As he came over one particular rise, a rise he was somehow familiar with, he already knew it was there. The sign as he lumbered by it read POCAHONTAS 5 and there just ahead of him was what he had expected—the cloud, the huge black trembling circling jellyfish cloud. He did not even slow the rig down, as if it would have done any good anyway—he thought "If rape is inevitable, lie back and enjoy it." Now the wind started. The truck stuttered from side to side. There was a roar growing out of the muddy silence. A slow eerie roar like the roar you hear from a football stadium a mile away, a roar from some Coliseum where strange unspeakable atrocities are taking place and you hear this roar disembodied inhuman like the sound of thousands of truck tires in the Lincoln Tunnel pounding louder until you are shaken loose from your spinal cord until your skin is flayed from you snakemolt this was the sound now. Blacker. Louder. Pounding. Then as if he'd been rammed from his blind side by a charging bull rhino he was whiplashed against the roof of the cab and wrenched spinning louder blacker the blackness bludgeoning his eyes he Gillespie in one of the drafty foyers of memory his eyes fistulas his eyes the spokesmen of torture the rain its stainless steel tongues the sun cauterized like a currant extraneous black the wilting shrapnel the flak . . . a pure tatooed cataract poured through a deep part in his skull . . .

Ted Williams spitting at the crowd . . . Sunday School . . . walking in a shallow river . . . stallion other side of fence snorts succulent grass yanks it out sidewise . . . I wait to see the lackeys stinking in their traces . . . in 1863 . . . for six years now leaving the cathedrals of madness . . . but you can't lose a game you're not a contestant in . . . jamsticky kids at the screen . . . Ophelia of the Tastee Freez . . . the anal dry heaves . . . tangled ghost of childhood . . . Christbeards . . . a hole with hair around

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it . . . you who think you are Wallace Stevens . . . death card mimi diana roach . . . in the chilly gym of the orphanage smell of coal dust . . . free bottle cod-liveroil . . . battleship in Harbour . . . stupid filthy homely bitch . . . wiping ass with headmaster's picture dedication yearbook . . . chickennecked derelict redeye pissing in the alley . . eternity of pain let me back in . . . want to lie with my belly to the sun . . . subway protocol . . . tear the leeches from my eyes . . . noon in the fog at the sandbar . . . through the window Mrs. Dennison lizard hands jerks off mongoloid twins . . . Michael Bozo Stylites parrotheaded fanatic . . . shimmering green dendrite . . . Pinworm's Wedding . . . whiskey whap . . . smell the grass she is breathing in my mouth . . . musical antelopes musical mothers log jam in toilet . . . you by the trellis snapdragons brushing your nipples . . . shook your mane of river hair . . . song of glass sparrow breath at keyhold . . . pelvic wool skull fuck brain porridge . . . Death Card . . . worm's footman . . . lips of gristle . . . globes of putty that were her breasts . . . Anderoid Airlines spring flight to Nassau . . . the zebralight in your hair preached religions of joy . . . dance in moonlight crystalline spider . . . why every Mexican is named Jesus . . . Worthington shuffles day is done/wifeless flat whining son . . . cigarsmell and hotdogs Yankee Stadium . . . I secretly hoped the girl they found was you . . . if your father is a Pope . . . soft birds long transparent necks in the bathroom violin stigma . . . We have made a covenant with death and with hell we are in a pine-panneled killing . . . not with me against me . . . Diana Mimi try to kill time til the next disaster the one-footed waltz arsenical kisses life's four sacraments let me wash first my bloody winter eyes legitimate Jesus you have made me up I am a poem yes lady I can sing and the song will blind you spinning helpless blacker louder. Silence. Dropping. Fast Great black and cobalt webs. Faces Mimi Diana Roach The Death Card The Death Card The Earth as we leave we'll piss in the holy water the Good Earth his stomach rushing to meet . . .

and then six and a half octillion tons of haymaker met him headon, splintering Michael Alexander Gillespie, scapegoat in peckertracked corduroys, splintering him and 24 tons of cement truck into billions of invisible oblivious molecules forever.

Trooper Kleinhesselink of the State Highway Patrol reported that it appeared that the driver of the cement truck must have lost control of the vehicle and it had rumbled down the 40-foot embankment on the outskirts of Cherokee. He reported that the driving conditions that evening had been perfect—not a cloud in the sky—so weather had not been a factor in the accident. He reported that he thought it rather peculiar that there were no skid marks on the highway and not even any tiretracks in the freshly excavated dirt down the side of the embankment. It was decided that an autopsy be performed on the driver, whose wallet identified him as Michael Alexander Gillespie, age 27. The company whose truck was involved, Brownell of Sioux City, was notified and they in turn contacted his father, in

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Maryland, who was listed as the next of kin. The body of Gillespie which had been decapitated cleanly in the accident was taken, along with its head, to the county coroner's office in Pocahontas, some forty miles distant from the scene of the accident. An examination proved that Gillespie had not died from the decapitation but had suffered the most massive aneurysm that the attending physician had ever seen in his twenty-two years of medical practice. The aneurysm, then, must have been what caused him to leave the road and roar over the embankment to his grisly finish.

Noone digs a two-bit Tiresias, no one ever listens. Michael Alexander Gillespie had what he was told by Diana Someone to be a morbid mind; he was always looking for the worst. If he could just tell her now what he had seen if he could point out to her the bullshit gurus waiting to con her into taking the steps she was taking into the cage she didn't even know she was in, well, she wouldn't listen anyway. No one ever does.

—KEN MCCULLOUGH

STATEMENT OF OWNERSHIP, MANAGEMENT AND CIRCULATION (Act of August 12, 1970, Section 3685, Title 39, United States Code).

1. Date of Filing: October 1, 1971
2. Title of Publication: Fantastic Stories
3. Frequency of Issue: Bi-Monthly
4. Location of Known Office of Publication: 69-62 230th St., Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y. 11364
5. Location of the Headquarters or General Business Offices of the Publishers: Purchase, N.Y.; Box 175, Portchester, N.Y.
6. Names and Addresses of Publisher, Editor, and Managing Editor:
   Publisher: ULTIMATE PUBLISHING CO., INC., 69-62 230th St., Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y.
   Editor: Ted White, Box 7, Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y.
   Managing Editor: None
7. Owner: Ultimate Publishing Co., Inc., 69-62 230th St., Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y.; Sol Cohen, 69-62 230th St., Oakland Gardens, Flushing, N.Y., Arthur Bernhard, Purchase, N.Y., Box 175, Portchester, N.Y.
8. Known Bondholders, Mortgagees, and Other Security Holders Owning or Holding 1 Percent or More of Total Amount of Bonds, Mortgages or Other Securities: None
11. EXTENT AND NATURE OF CIRCULATION

	Average No. Copies Each Issue During Preceding 12 Months	Actual Number of Copies of Single Issue Published Nearest to Filing Date
A. Total No. Copies Printed (Net Press Run)	78,528	70,211
B. Paid Circulation		
1. Sales through Dealers and Carriers, Street Vendors and Counter Sales	22,824	25,600
2. Mail Subscriptions	776	819
C. Total Paid Circulation	23,600	26,419
D. Free Distribution by Mail, Carrier or Other Means		
1. Samples, Complimentary, and Other Free Copies	139	151
2. Copies Distributed to News Agents, But Not Sold	76,869	67,885
E. Total Distribution (Sum of C and D)	23,741	26,570
F. Office Use, Left-Over, Unaccounted, Spoiled After Printing	54,787	43,641
G. Total (Sum of E & F—should equal net press run shown in A)	78,528	70,211

I certify that the statements made by me above are correct and complete.

Sol Cohen, Publisher

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I first met Rog Ebert in the late fifties, when he was a young fan attending his first science fiction convention. He published fanzines and did all the things fans usually do, and then, like so many others, his areas of interest shifted, and I didn't hear of him for several years. When I did, it was because he was making a name for himself as a film critic on the Chicago Sun-Times*—and shortly after that, because he'd been tapped to write the screenplay for "Beyond the Valley of the Dolls." His sojourn in the lands of Sodom and Gomorrah have not irreparably corrupted him, however, as the following short story makes amply clear. "Sf has started to interest me again recently," he says, "and I've tried some fiction." The following story, he adds, "is* not *about leprechauns."*

AFTER THE LAST MASS

ROGER EBERT

Illustrated by JEFF JONES

It was a little cathedral town on the west coast of Ireland that had struck a nice balance between faith and pragmatism. The pubs couldn't open on Sundays until the last Mass was out at the cathedral, but on the other hand the last Mass at the cathedral began and ended at least half an hour before the last Mass at any other church in town. Half-twelve Sunday found me in John Holland's pub at the foot of Treacy Avenue.

Never mind what business brought me over to the coast, or why I was needing a jar at barely past noon on a Sunday. The two—the business and the thirst—were related, as they often are, but suffice it to say I found myself with time on my hands. Time itself has a certain rhythm, for that matter, in a public house like John Holland's, where during the last bank strike my Uncle Ned kept his I.R.A. bonus payment in the safe, and it wasn't until the strike was six months over that I (too literal-minded, as always) realized that the "safe" was in fact the icebox.

I made my discovery that very Sunday, as a matter of fact. Ned kept me waiting for a matter of twenty minutes before he finally appeared in the doorway of John Holland's, wearing his good black suit that was shamefully covered over, as usual, with a fine layer of ash.

"Waiting long then, lad?" His cigarette bobbed up and down and dribbled more ash onto his vest.

"A matter of twenty minutes," I told him.

"Did you order a jar, then?"

I indicated my Guinness.

"I'll have one of the same, Johnny," Ned told John Holland. "And . . ." He looked sideways as if calculating the reach of my charity, and held up a finger to keep John Holland waiting. "Do you feel like a drop of the Red-

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breast?" he asked me. "When they close at two they don't open again until seven of a Sunday."

"You silvery-tongued devil," I said, "you talked me into it."

"And two glasses of the Jameson Redbreast, the twelve-year-old," Ned told John Holland. "I suppose you'll want ice in yours."

I said that was correct. John Holland bent over the tiny icebox beneath his cash register and extracted, with some ceremony, a tablespoon containing a nearly-invisible sliver of ice. This he dropped into my glass with distaste, and returned the tablespoon to the ice bowl and the bowl to the box. Something inside the icebox caused him to pause. "Here's good news for you, Ned," he said. "A five pound note left over from the bank strike."

"Glory be to God," Ned said. "Let's have a look at it then."

John Holland removed the limp bill from the icebox and handed it over the bar. Uncle Ned examined it as if it were a sign from Heaven. "Left over from the bank strike," he repeated wonderingly after John Holland. "Sure and it's good as found money. We haven't looked inside that icebox since cold weather."

"Not all that long," John Holland said with a sidelong look at me. "The ice is fresh this week. But the bill must have escaped my notice."

Uncle Ned paused long enough to have a painful little scuffle with his conscience. "Are you quite sure it's mine, then, John? Might it not be—"

"I found it on your shelf," John Holland said.

"Glory be to God," said Uncle Ned, holding the fiver up to the window

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light. Six or seven of the other customers leaned over to have a look at it, and just then a short little man with a bright green cap came in through the door.

"The Family Circle," he announced. The fiver was forgotten as the customers clustered around the little man, craning their necks over his shoulder to have a look at the list. The Family Circle was the parish lottery at the cathedral, and a man in luck could get a ten pound return on his sixpence.

"Look for John Holland, will you?" John Holland said from behind the bar.

"It's not your week, John," the little man said. "I looked for you on the way over."

John Holland shook his head and drew a Guinness for the little man anyway. The little man took a deep draught of it and placed it on the bar as if it were a brick and he thirty years a mason.

"Will you put a pound on next week for me?" Uncle Ned said, after the Guinness had its opportunity to find a home.

"A pound, then?" said the little man, impressed.

Ned held up his fiver. "Look here what John Holland found in his safe," he said. "It's all that's left from my I.R.A. bonus, and until just now I didn't know *it* was left."

"You'll put it all on one name, or spread them around?" the little man asked.

"Oh, spread it around," my uncle said. "That way if it's my name that isn't lucky, another name will be. Put it into sixpences and list it under myself, and Sean here, and Rosalie Anne . . ."

Ned began to recite the catalogue of his relatives, near and far, living and dead. I had a closer look at the little man. He was *particularly* little. He had a face as gnarled and brown as an old briar pipe, and a tweed jacket worn enough to have been hand-woven by the man who invented the technique. His shoes turned up at their ends, and so did his nose, and his chin as well, so that when he thrust his head into the air for a mouthful of stout he looked half-prepared to levitate. He caught my eye on him and put his glass down.

"And are you new here?" he said, fingering his pencil and his pad of Family Circle tickets.

"I'm just visiting with my Uncle Ned," I said, nodding in his direction.

"And a finer man you'll not find," the little man declared. There was a nod up and down the bar as my uncle triumphantly remembered his grandmother's maiden name, and the little man wrote it on one of the tickets.

"And now put down Tigue," my uncle said. "That was a dog I had when I was a boy."

"You'll enter under so many names you'll forget them if you win," John Holland said from the other side of the bar.

"How many Tigues can there be?" my uncle said. "He was a fine, strong dog, black as night and swift as a Greyhound."

"Tigue," the little man in the green cap repeated, licking the end of his pencil and writing it in. That was the last of my uncle's sixpences. He took the fiver and gave him four pound notes in change, and looked up and down the bar.

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"Any more then, lads?"

There were not, and he drained the last of his Guinness and hurried out the door.

"Well, that's forty chances you have of winning," John Holland said to my uncle.

"That's forty more than I had last week," my uncle said, pleased with himself.

"And forty more than you'll have next week," said O'Reilly, who was sitting opposite the bar from us.

"And forty more than he'll have soon again," crackled old Doyle, sitting next to O'Reilly.

"And forty more than he *should* have, if justice were to be distributed fairly," said Edmund Riordan, another of my uncle's old mates. By this time Ned's face was growing red, and he put down the last of his whiskey.

"There's forty chances," he said, "and I've got four pounds left, and that's more than the lot of you, and should I *lose"*—he pronounced the possibility as if it were remote—"I've done my part for the poor of the parish by the simple act of entering."

That brought silence to the bar; there was no denying the rightness of what he said. My Uncle Ned looked up and down the bar, satisfied, and pointed to John Holland to refill our glasses. Then he shook a Player out of its packet, lit it, and exhaled as if it were fine Havana.

"And here this time next week," he said, "when that fellow comes in—what's that chap's name?"

"What's what chap's name?" said John Holland, his hand on the Redbreast bottle.

"That funny little chap that takes the Family Circle," Ned said.

"I'm not at all sure that I know," John Holland said. He poured Ned's glass full.

"I've never heard him say his name," Doyle said from the other side of the bar. "In point of fact, I'm not all that certain I've laid eyes on him before this morning."

O'Reilly and Riordan shook their heads. Uncle Ned looked from one to the other and then back again to John Holland.

"But doesn't he come in here every Sunday after the last Mass is out at the cathedral?"

"I've never seen him before," John Holland said. 'It's usually Father McHugh, on his way back to the rectory for Sunday dinner."

Uncle Ned thought for a moment about that. "Yes," he said, "it usually is." Silence. "Then who was this chap?"

"Must have been a new chap, filling in," Holland said.

"That's what I thought," said Doyle.

"When he came in with the Family Circle," John Holland said, "I thought to myself, Father McHugh must be . . ."

But his voice trailed off as Father McHugh himself walked in through the door.

"Fine afternoon, lads," the priest said. They all nodded, staring at him dumbstruck. The priest made his way toward the bar and then stopped at all the eyes on him. "Well then," he said, "have you seen a ghost, then?"

They shook their heads silently. John Holland looked at my uncle, who cleared his throat and forced out a weak question: "Have you got the Family Circle, Father?"

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"Not only do I have it," the priest said, fishing it from his pocket, "but there's good news on it for you this week, John."

John Holland's eyebrows shot up.

"You've won ten bob," the priest said. "It's the first in a long time for you, Johnny my boy."

"Let me see that list," John Holland said. The priest handed it over and John Holland studied it carefully. "Well I'll be God damned, asking your pardon, Father," he said at last.

"What's that now?" said the priest.

"My name is right here on this list," Holland said.

"Why of course it is," said the priest. "Didn't I just now finish reading it to you?"

"Ay, but..." Holland looked around the room until his eye lit on my uncle. "Weren't you just after looking at this list yourself, Ned?"

"I was," Ned said, "and your name was not on it."

"But right here's the list, lads," said Father McHugh. "I'm the first to have it, every week."

My Uncle Ned dropped his cigarette on the floor and ground it out very deliberately, his eyes focused on some middle distance away from the priest. A pained silence fell on the pub, and John Holland broke it at last.

"There was a little chap," he said slowly, "about so high." He held out his hand not too far above his belt, and then lowered it an inch. "He was in here not ten minutes ago, Father, with the Family Circle, and he took a quid from Ned here for forty chances on next week."

"A little chap, you say?" said the priest.

"About so high," said Uncle Ned, holding out his own hand. "He was wearing a green cap, and he had a funny look in his eye, now I think on it . . ."

"And turned-up toes and a turned-up nose," I volunteered.

Another silence fell along the bar. The priest looked at me, and Ned looked at John Holland, and O'Reilly and Doyle looked at each other, and Riordan studied his glass. My Uncle Ned finally spoke again. "He—he filled out the coupons for me," he said, fishing in his pockets. "I took a chance on myself, and one on Sean here, and one on my old dog Tigue . . ."

His voice trailed away. His hand came out of his pocket filled with squares of paper that were as blank on one side as they were blank on the other. He put them on the bar and stared at them.

"I saw it myself, Father," John Holland said. "Ned came into the possession of a five-pound note just this past noon. I found it in the icebox, where it'd been mislaid since it must be last October."

The priest moved toward the bar and held out his hand half-consciously for the pint John Holland thrust into it. "You found it just this morning?" he said.

"That's right," said my Uncle Ned. "The chap—the chap sat right there as big as life and drank a stout and went about his business."

"Right here?" said the priest. He lifted the empty pint glass that was still resting on the bar, and looked very seriously at the shamrock beneath it. Then he passed his eyes over the faces of the men up and down the bar.

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"Well I'll be God damned!" my Uncle Ned said finally.

The priest hardly seemed to hear him. "It's modern times, that's what I lay it up to," Father McHugh said. He looked fiercely around the room. "It's modern times, and all these changes, that are going on every time you turn around."

He took a drink and put his pint glass down on the bar next to the empty one, and the shamrock. "In the old days," he said, "they were content with ten percent. That did them very nicely, thank you, for going on a thousand years and more, and *now* will you look at them."

All around the bar, the men nodded seriously. My Uncle Ned reached into his vest pocket to see if the other four pounds were still there, and they were.

The priest drained the last of his pint and turned to go.

"Just half a moment, Father," said my Uncle Ned. He took two of the pound notes and thrust them into the priest's hand. "I don't like this business," Ned said. "I don't like any part of it. Now you take these two pounds, father, and you put them in the box for the poor . . ."

The priest looked at the notes and at my Uncle Ned. "You've had a difficult time," he said, "and a strange experience. But you must not pass up your fun, Ned. I'll take the two quid if you'll put it into the Family Circle. That way perhaps the bread cast upon the waters . . ."

He let his voice trail off with a shrug of his shoulders.

"What name shall I put it under?" Ned asked John Holland.

"Well you'd best not put it under the name of a *dog* this time," Holland said. "That may have been your mistake the *last* time."

Ned nodded. "All Saints," he said. "Put it into eighty sixpences, all under All Saints."

The priest nodded. "I'll just write them into the book after I have my dinner at the rectory," he told Ned. "It would take too long now. I'll have the tickets for you the next time we meet."

My Uncle Ned said that would suit him fine, and all the men around the bar saluted the priest as he left. Then a truly heavy silence, the one that had been threatening all afternoon, fell for good. John Holland stood with his hands braced on the back of the bar. Doyle finished the last of his pint and shuffled away without even saying good day. My uncle lit another cigarette, and I was just on the brink of proposing a Jameson's Rebreast to break the quiet when Father McHugh walked in through the door.

"Good day, lads," he said.

My uncle looked up. "Back again then, are you Father?"

"Back again?" said the priest, astonished. "Sure it's the first time I've stepped foot inside this door today."

—ROGER EBERT

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TIMMY WAS EIGHT

Susan Doenim was born and raised in Grand Island, Nebraska, but now lives with her parents in Los Angeles where, says Miss Doenim, "Everybody's rushing all the time, you know? They're crazy!" *She tells us she has been writing stories for "four or five years," but this is her first to be submitted for publication. She is, she reveals, sixteen years old, and a high school senior. Her current "literary favorites" are Rod McKuen, Tolkien and Charles Platt, and she set out to write a story about fear. "Does anybody read stories to get scared, anymore?"*

SUSAN DOENIM

PEOPLE'S PARK. The green darkness of summer; globes of light on the streetlamps illuminating patches of grass, shining on disconnected bits of path. Traffic noises from the park's crossroad, hidden behind the trees. A stifled cry from the bushes; groans that stop suddenly; wet sucking sounds.

There, behind the shrubbery: in the middle of red, wet bones, pools of dark and steaming liquid, strings and lumps of flesh, there in the middle of the corpse (could you call it a corpse? At what point in the butchery did it become just a horrible pile of unrelated tissues, bones, and blood?)—there was the alien.

White, perfectly white, gleaming in the light of the streetlamps. Protected by the same monomolecular skin that shielded it from the burning cold of the methane snow fields on its distant home. The intense heat of Earth's night was held away, with just a bony sheath protruding through the invisible skin to accomplish the terrible feasting. The blood splatters smeared on the skin, then disappeared.

It was a large, amorphous creature. It gathered itself into billows and ripples of motion as it fed, spreading out over the sodden red grass or contracting into a sphere. The tip of the sheath secreted a powerful enzyme which dissolved the tissue; the semi-solid mass was drawn up the sheath, through the invisible shell, and into the creature.

TIMMY WAS EIGHT. He lived with his parents in a three-story house on Parkside Avenue. This evening he sat with his mother on the couch, watching television. At nine o'clock his mother told him that he had to go to bed. He didn't want to. He could remember all the times that he had been allowed to stay up late; he used to brag to his friends whenever he saw a late TV program. When he was younger his mother had told him that if he wasn't in bed at the right time, the men would

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come in a van and take him back to the factory.

Timmy's father sat in an easy chair on the other side of the room. He had a little folding table in front of him; while he watched television he played solitaire. He usually drank beer from about nine o'clock until the end of the Johnny Carson show, and said nothing the entire evening. He was waiting for Timmy to go to bed so that he could get the first bottle.

"I want you in bed before the next program starts," said Timmy's mother.

Timmy sat where he was, unconcerned. He watched the commercial, a station break, and two more commercials. Just before the end of the third commercial he jumped off the couch and ran upstairs.

THE GRINDING of heels on gravel. Voices from the other side of the bushes, people walking by on the path. The alien did not *hear* them, but its own senses were adequate. It flattened out on the ground, a large, thin, brightly bleached section of the grass. On its own world there were no colors; there was the uninterrupted white of the day, and the starless black of the silent, lifeless night. The alien was invisible against the snows of its home, and it had no way of knowing that it was terrifyingly conspicuous in the park.

After a while it contracted once more. It pushed out two thin lateral flaps; it could glide gracefully on the scant breezes of its home world, but on Earth the harsher winds carried it about uncontrollably. From a distance it might have looked like a large section of newspaper twirling over the park grounds, over the sidewalk, across the street.

THE HALL was *safe.* The dark brown carpeting felt good beneath his feet; it also kept him *safe,* all the way up the stairs to the bathroom and beyond. As long as he was on the carpeting, the monsters couldn't get him. The agreement had been that he was fair game as soon as he lifted both feet at once.

The bathroom was all right, too, as long as the light was on. The usual procedure was to stand in the hall and reach around the corner into the bathroom with his right hand. When he had turned on the light switch he could go in and safely brush his teeth. The bathroom was easy: he never felt afraid in the bathroom.

When he left the bathroom, he was still *safe* on the carpet. The hall went along further, all the way past his parent's bedroom to his own. Sometimes he was afraid in the dark hall, even though he knew he was still protected by the carpet. Sometimes he would flick on the light in his parents' room as he went by; he would come back out to turn it off after he put on the light in his own room.

IT SWUNG WILDLY on the currents of air. It had no emotions, no fear or curiosity, only hunger. It had been interrupted during its last feeding, and now it sought another meal. The wind whipped it around, above the parked cars, the litter baskets, and signs. It crashed into the building across from the park. At the moment of impact it

(Continued on page 81)

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THE HORROR SOUTH OF RED HOOK

OVA HAMLET

Illustrated by STEVE HARPER

Ova Hamlet returns! Her previous forays into these pages began with "Man Swings SF" (October, 1969) and, improbably, continued with "Music in the Air" (August, 1970), "Battered Like a Brass Bippy" (December, 1970) and "War of the Doom Zombies" (June, 1971). The story which follows is, we think, self-explanatory, but inasmuch as it is not made clear within the context of the story, it would be well to point out that Ova Hamlet's "keeper" is the long-suffering and much put upon Richard A. Lupoff, *who fled the length of a continent but has not escaped her malignant burden . . .*

THE FOOD HERE is palatable although bland, wickedly bland, I suspect by design, for our keepers do not wish us to be overstimulated in any way. Overstimulation means excitement, and excitement leads to the stirring up of memories, hideous memories of blasphemous horrors, unnatural recollections of savage and unnatural events upon which a gibbous moon leered monstrously.

And yet they are permitting me to write this account of the terrible events that transpired in Dutchess City that horrid autumn day. They have granted me the use of this soft crayon and floppy-edged paper, that you whose blessed eyes are smitten by the impious and decayed occurences which befell me may judge whether such things can be in this accursed and doom-clouded world, or whether it was all a monstrous dream, a figment of a blasted mind slithering its slime-laden way down the squirming path to madness.

I have not always been the shattered and trembling husk of humanity I am today. Once I was a youthful and vigorous man, but recently graduated from the University with a degree in certain matters which excited the malicious interest of numerous prospective greedy employers. Residing happily as I was in the great Eastern metropolis, I received the awful summons to visit a small town some miles above gotham on the edge of the dank and foetid river.

Why I chose to accept that accursed invitation I will never know. Perhaps it was in the mistaken belief that a day's excursion into the rank and weed-choked countryside would assuage the ennui provoked by the mad whirl of metropolitan existence, perhaps it was a desire to immerse myself in the ancient towns and countryside where my ancestors, blue-eyed, pale-skinned and roman-nosed, had settled incredible lustra ago, forsaking the

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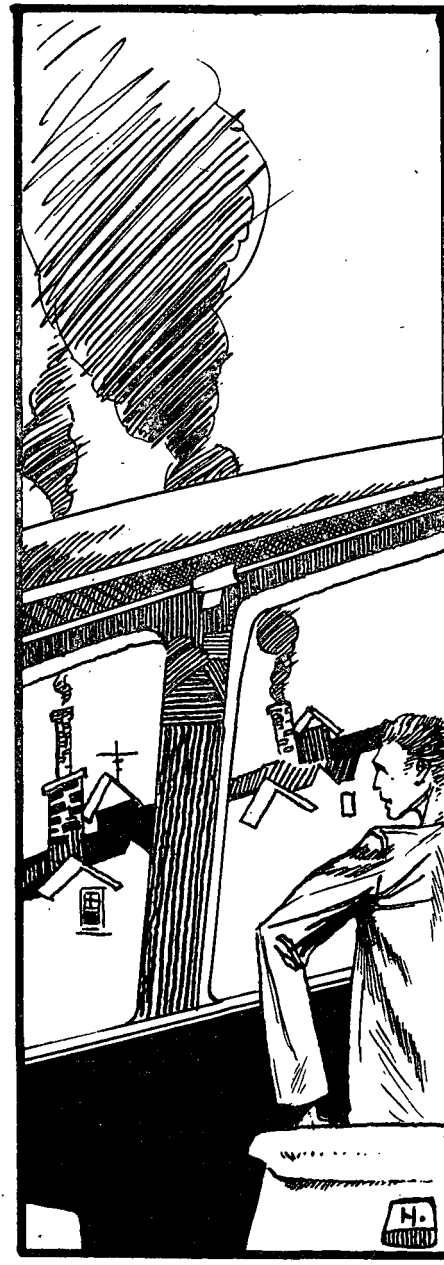
looming towers and hideously shrieking boulevards of the city to the ill-spoken mongrel immigrant hordes who pollute its dreadful towers and disgusting byways with their evil-smelling viands and uncouth speech.

O, how I curse the mad impulse that made me accept that accursed invitation, and yet, as I boarded the grimy and deteriorating coach at the rail terminus I felt only a slight foreboding of the doom-laden malign fate which lurked in that northern hamlet waiting to snare the innocent and unwary in its scaly claws.

The car made its uneven way, swaying and lurching evilly with each hideous curve and devilish bump of the ancient and unholy rails, wicker seats that looked balefully out at archaic passengers in a forgotten past creaking cacophonically and ceiling lights in their ancient fluted cones faltering and dimming as the train rattled ever farther on its evil way to the indescribable terrors of the ancient exurb which was my ill-fated destination.

At length, weary of peering anxiously through yellowed and cracking windows coated with savage centuries of black grime, I felt my blond-tousled and pure-bred head fall upon my cleanly garbed chest, my clear blue eyes closed and I dreamed. I dreamed a hideous and dreadful dream, a somnambulism in which certain awful shapes capered and howled beneath a leering moon and winking stars whose ancient malignity showered hollowly down upon a stench-ridden and blasphemous throng.

It was the lurch of the car which awakened me, trembling and hot-



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eared, from my terrible dream. With grateful hands I took my hat from the high and terrifying rack and jammed it fearfully upon my aristocratic head, and with feet that quivered and jounced with relief I made my fearsome way from that terrible old car, watching gladly as the train pulled out and continued along its terrible route to the northward.

I ascended an ancient and decaying stairway, drawing shudderingly away from the archaic creatures that seemed more to *slither* or to *climb* the stairs all about me than they did to walk as any natural creature would do. At incredible and weary length I found myself at the dizzying top of the terrible stairway, and forced to enter a gigantic room whose towering roof and vaulted windows seemed to smirk down evilly upon those of us who crept fearfully about on the frigidly *dry* flagging upon the floor.

Involuntarily I crouched against a cruel and superannuated wall, my Anglo-Saxon fingers anxiously and without conscious will tracing the old scrollery that remained under untold eras of accumulated fetor. As I drew away from the horrible pediment I saw that my white patrician fingers were *marked a grimy shade where they had contacted that dreadful wood!*

Screaming in terror I capered madly across the cold stones, crashing cacophonously into the ominously *heavy* and garment-clad figures that clustered and gibbered there in that awful room. Even as I burst through the tarnished portals the vaulted ceiling threw back my shrieks unmercifully, the dread portents of my own cries echoing horridly in my small and well-positioned ears.

Not daring to stand exposed beneath the pollenous and smirking sky I hurled my trembling form into the back seat of an ancient but incredibly ill-preserved hack that stood beside the doors of that cursed and horrible building, never even taking note of the unholy coven of terrible creatures already inhabiting the passenger section of the dreadful vehicle.

Recoiling in horror from them and sending another scream of monstrous fear crashing to the baleful roof of the hack I threw my entire weight upon the moldy door and, gibbering a prayer of gratitude to whatever malign deity had seen fit to provide me with even the momentary succor of release, tumbled painfully upon the cruelly gravel-encrusted turf upon which the hack rested.

Staring frantically in all directions in desperate hope of visioning an alternative means of transportation, I reached the harrowing conclusion that *only that single hack stood ready to carry passengers from the station.* Had I but noticed this evil and maxillary anomaly my keen caucasian suspicions had inevitably driven me to flee madly across the ancient fields and decrepit roadways that mark Dutchess City.

But, terrified by the black and inescapable fate that seemed with a tacit and noisome persistency to seek to ensnare me, I lurched despairingly around the rusted and grime-coated rear of the hack and made my unhappy way to the blasphemous door which let onto a seat beside that already occupied by the driver.

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May I never again gaze upon a countenance so filled with wise and cynical malignity as that of the hackman! His hair hung uncouthly to the grimy collar of his ancient and tattered camisole, his eyes glared redly out of a sallow skin marked with the awful signs of foreign blood and indescribable dissolution. His teeth showed, blackened stumps of what once must have been hideous yellow fangs, while most terrible of all his frightful and malevolent nose showed incontestable signs of a fatal and hideous convexity.

Emitting from his aged and terrible throat a chuckle of indescribable hideousness the driver threw his gears into motion with a terrifying clash that rattled and boomed horribly off the echoing rocks that surround the rutted roadway leading away from the stagnant and odorous river. I cast fear-sharpened vision into the rear compartment of the hack where the dread creatures I had so narrowly escaped awful moments earlier where gathered in evil comity, nodding and hissing scabrously over stacks of books whose very titles I dared not whisper under my breath lest the ancient gods of madness come crashing up from the abyss into which they had long been cast and uncertainly chained by sorcerers of incredible antiquity and wicked puissance.

"You girls all going to the college," the driver hissed in a dry and serpentine sibilance that sent tremors shuddering up and down my well-clad spine. From the terrifying creatures in the rear compartment there echoed a terrible cackle of affirmation, whereupon the aged but somehow dreadfully *strong* driver turned to me, his baleful gimlet eyes taking in my noble native-born countenance and modern garb. "And you, sir?" he mouthed arcanely.

Aye, had I but had the presence of mind to cancel then and there my projected interview, to return even with that mind-blasting monstrosity of a driver to the terrible towering terminal and return to the metropolis where I had my mad and abandoned abode in those days, what horrors might have I avoided! But no, driven by the noble honesty of mine ancestors I whispered fearsomely, "To the factory."

What expression of terror those words provoked upon his face, what new paleness infused his mottled and wattled epidermis when he heard me croak those foully portentous phrases, and yet, pursuing his evil course to the end, he replied in that terrible and incredibly malign voice, "What building number?"

Numbed with fear at this new demand I clawed frantically at my breast, extracting from the neatly-tailored pocket of my modern jacket the very invitation in response to which I had undertaken this terrible and unprecedented journey. My eye slithered across the deathly pale document which, clawlike, my fingers unfolded and, reading the terrible words again I hissed back in terror and remorse the number which he required.

Down decaying byways and along rutted lanes the terrible hack swayed and clattered, its ancient frame protesting with frightful squeaks each new turn and grade. Hideous buildings of terrifying and unholy antiquity leered down upon us, cracked and discolored

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windows peering balefully at the noisome intruders while rotting walls, long bared of cracked and flaking paint, loomed obscenely in the terrible morning sunlight. What horrors had they witnessed in untold eons that stretched back before the recollection of infant humanity!

For what seemed endless intervals we swayed and rattled between the shacks and shanties of Dutchess City. My blood crept fearfully through my terrified veins and arteries while tremors of fear shook my gorgeous frame as my terrified glances into the rear compartment were met by impudent and unfathomably evil glares from the dahl-lined orbs of the terrible creatures there clustered.

At length the hack drew up before the vine-coated and stone-walled buildings of the college, buildings in which untold rites were performed by flickering tapers as the horrible creatures of which a clutch gathered and writhed behind me pursued such blasphemous studies as the merest syllabus of which would drive any sane and wholesome Celt gibbering and drooling down the awful corridors of madness in horror and fright.

The hackman exited mercifully from his side of the ancient vehicle to aid the *creatures* in extricating themselves from the rear compartment while I fearsomely sought to ascertain that the lock which might hold any menace out of my own section of the conveyance was well secured. With savage cries and malign laughter the creatures retrieved their noisome and menacing luggage from the rear of the hack and made their way into the menacing gate-arch of that savage institution.

I cringed away from the terrible *strong* driver as he regained his seat at the wheel of the hack and, engine droning menacingly, we rolled once more in the direction of the establishment to which the terrible pale document had summoned my pitiable but handsome figure. The hackman sought to draw from me, as we rode down one decrepit thoroughfare after another 'neath looming structures of ramshackle menace, such pitiful few secrets as remained mine. "Up from the city, huh?" he queried in that dry, frightening voice of his. "Comin' t'work at the factory?"

My throat too dry with terror and apprehension to permit the formation of even simple answers, I nodded a silent yes or no as each question threatened the poor tottering remnant of my once proud sanity. What awful motive could this hideous and clammy driver have for probing, digging, seeking out the very secrets of my existence?

Finally he pulled up at the frightful doors of the building to which I had been summoned. I pressed the full sum demanded into the hideous claw and fled in terror through the awful and aged portal which presented itself to my terrified eyes. Another of those frightful *creatures* awaited within, but thankfully, even as I could feel a scream of indescribable terror welling up within my throat, I espied a figure of tolerable horror hastening down a balefully lighted corridor to conduct me, trembling as with an ague, into a cubicle where I was permitted to sit in a frightful chair of incalculable antiquity and gradually regain possession of my shattered wits.

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My host made small talk of a dark and foreboding nature, then, drawing from his pocket a packet of rolled tobacco, offered me a smoke which I declined with a violent wave of my trembling hand and fearful shake of the head. He lit a terrible cylinder of tobacco himself, dropping his baleful and malevolent matchstick into an ancient and hideously menacing ashtray that stood in all its menacing frightfulness on the edge of his cruel and impious desk.

What events then transpired I shudder to recollect. The terrors to which I was subjected no sound mind could comprehend and yet retain its sanity as, mine host ever at my elbow, murmuring obscenities foul beyond decent repetition, we toured corridors and chambers of untold horror wherein labored palefaced and paleshirted creatures whose awful and scabrous countenances bespoke such horrors as only some denizen of the nether regions might conceive in a hideous nightmare of terrifying decay.

Whether the creatures we viewed, at once terrifying and pitiable, were the malign perpetrators of unfathomable horrors, or were themselves the whimpering victims of indescribable maltreatment it was impossible to fathom, for upon each visage there was written a foul compendium of the terrifying characteristics that tend to mark eldritch fiend and tortured subject alike: cruelty, vice, greed, dissipation, suffering, nausea, hatred, bitterness, ineffable sadness and fierce ambition, indescribable yearnings for unnameable satisfactions, these and a thousand more emotions met and were blended into the expressions of anger, misery, and terrible satisfactions far more revolting than their denials.

Beside each of the things that we saw, both pitiable and fearsome in their visage, stood either or both of a pair of artifacts of malign and baleful significance. Many of the wretches had seemingly been furnished by their masters with ashtrays as terrible as that which I had seen on the desk of my terrible host, ashtrays which they perpetually filled and emptied, filled and emptied with a terrible nervous compulsiveness which caused me to avert my eyes in nausea and pity.

Others seemed to have chosen to forgo the questionable relief of the ashtrays, and were furnished instead with little pasteboard cups the exteriors of which were blazoned with arcane slogans of such mind-blasting savagery that I dare not set them down in this document, even though my keepers assure me that I am perfectly safe and even though they permit me, nay, encourage me to record with my soft crayon every detail of the horror which sent me shrieking and capering to the very doorways of madness and beyond.

No! There are some blasphemies too horrid to be repeated, even in a private document such as this, which is unlikely to be read save by my keepers and, if they deem it helpful, perhaps someday by those members of my family adjudged strong and calm-natured enough to face truths more horrible than the average man can even imagine.

And yet those pasteboard cups were filled, many of them, with a brownish and murk-tempered liquid of such disgusting appearance that only once did I permit myself to approach a cup

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closely enough for my nostrils to be assailed by the fetor that rose from the noxious brew along with a hideous and unwholesome steam. Further, and by far the most terrifying of all, those frightful creatures of pity and cruelty were compelled by some unseen agency to take that disgusting and horrifying liquid into their very mouths, where some I saw swirling it about with signs of the most frightful agony before swallowing, whereupon it might commence whatever work of terrible malignity as its manifest evil nature might dictate.

Aye, the rooms in which those poor demons, if such be what they were, and may such Gods as exist and loom terribly over Mankind take rare pity and grant that I never again return there to find out, the rooms I say in which they were penned, were small, there being in most cases a mere handful of the brutes in each, a few being penned in solitary misery, while hideous black objects resting near them would eternally burst upon what peace they might attain through resignation to their miserable state, shrilling hellishly until they would detach part of the object and hold it to their tortured faces, hold it like a half-mask covering one side of their countenance from ear to mouth, while to my sickness I could hear the murmuring tones of their masters oozing slimily from the earpiece into their poor organs while they made quick and obsequious obeisance in their own pained murmurs into the mouth pieces of the instruments, replacing them and returning to whatsoever terrible and *squishy* task they might have been engaged in when the shrill summons came, thus to occupy themselves miserably until such time as another shrill summons should again call them to the terrible black *things*.

For what seemed unending centuries my terrible host, a look of detached glee fixed firmly upon his terrible face, led me from doorway to corridor, from corridor to lobby, from lobby to hallway, from hallway to room, through occasional changes of furnishing and dress, but yet always the omnipresent terrible ashtrays and hideous cups with their disgusting brown contents and blasphemous slogans, until shuddering with terror and revulsion I prayed succor.

Mine host now led me down yet another terrible corridor, through a line in a hideous room filled with terrible odors and the sounds of hundreds of the poor demon-slaves whispering over the blasphemous details of their awful tasks while they shoveled mouthfulls of neauseating stuff which I assumed to be the dreadful food of the demon-slaves, into their sweating and pasty-complexioned faces.

Guided by my host I seated myself near the end of a long table and waited, immobile, crushed beyond protest or the impulse to escape by the horrors which I had witnessed, until that tormentor returned with two trays of the demon-slave food, one of which he placed before me, apparently convinced that I would be capable of drawing nourishment from the vile concoctions which these dreadful creatures were forced to consume.

Dreadful chunks of burned cadavers littered my tray, drenched to a soft and disgusting consistency by rancid gra-

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vies, while clumps of deceased vegetation, long boiled to a pale and uniform tastelessness from which there yet emanated a horrid and disgusting odor on waves of luke-warm fetor, lay moldering between the partial corpses. Most horrifying of all, a dread china cup stood at one edge of the tray, filled with the horrible brown fluid I had seen earlier in the slave pens I had been compelled to tour.

So filled was I with horrified disgust that I permitted myself to mouth pewling inanities in response to my host's questions and remarks during that horrid meal, after which he led me through long and terrible corridors until we exited from that building of torment and walked painfully across a field covered with rank vegetation until we reached a second edifice of even more gigantic and unnatural proportions than that we had just exited.

To the reader of this crayoned account it may now seem that my tale is merely a recounting of horror piled upon horror, of one repellent experience following another equally dreadful, and indeed, now that it is all over (pray God that it *is* all over, that my present refuge is a reality and not merely the figment of a fevered somnambulism from which I may reawaken to find myself once more ensnared in Dutchess City!) it seems that such was the case. But I am a plain man, not accomplished in the construction of tales, and I seek merely to record with my soft crayon on my floppy-edged paper the reality which overtook me that day in that terrible town.

For the second edifice was larger even than the first, and instead of the many small chambers in which there labored the pale-garbed demon-slaves, my host now conducted me into a single quarter of inconceivable dimensions, a room—if so puny a word as room may be applied to so vast and terrible a place as that one—filled with the clattering and pounding of machinery.

And yet you must understand, you who read these words scrawled with my soft crayon on my floppy-edged paper, that the machines were not making the noises, nor were the machines the permanent occupants of this room through which passed humans or whatever pitiable creatures these were which I saw before my terrified and decaying eyes. Ah, no!

The humans, or demon-slaves, or whatever these poor wretches were, resembled those of the smaller chambers in the other building, but could be distinguished by their darker garb and generally gruffer manner, but what was most horrifying to contemplate was the fact that these poor organisms were apparently penned within the giant room, forced to perform obeisance and offer grovelling labor to the machines which entered, apparently of their own choice, at one end of the giant room, travelled its entire huge length, and exited at the other end.

And each machine, as served by the poor things that had their being in this monstrous prison-room, would in turn receive additional parts, or adjustments, or be cleaned or oiled or given a new case, or have a broken or maladjusted piece repaired or replaced, so that each machine, by the time it left

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the room, was in more desirable condition and order than it had been at the time of its arrival in the room, while the slaves, whom I finally discovered were replaced and permitted to go to other, pitiable hovels for periods of sleep, invariably left the place of their torment far more worn and dispirited than they had been when they entered it.

I speculated upon the energy-flow of the operations I had witnessed, hardly noticing the nonsensical murmurs of my guide as I tried to fathom the nature and purpose of this place in which life force was transplanted each day from the beings of human workers (if such they were) into the cold and sterile form of machines.

And yet, at length I did comprehend the baleful burden of the malign whispers of my host. With slowly dawning comprehension I came to grasp the meaning and the incredible horror of the awful whispers and imprecations which had been falling for so long a period upon my ears. It was almost impossible to credit my senses with the facts which they transmitted to my brain, and yet it could not be denied, it could not be turned away from.

Mine host was inviting me to become one of the demon-slaves who labored in such hopeless agony in the first building, designing and controlling the machines which robbed the life-energies of the poor wretches who worked in the second!

My brain reeled at the thought. What happened next I can only surmise, for even as I passed into a faint I seemed to enter a dread fantasy in which, seized by an inexplicable madness and a sort of demoniacal greed I actually *accepted* mine host's vile and despicable suggestion.

Somehow in this fugue my tormented brain seemed to live out a phantasmagoria of indescribable horror and vileness in which, returning to the great metropolis in which I had at that time my home, I somehow contrived to lure my own most loved ones back to the accursed village known as Dutchess City, and install them in one of its rotting and disgusting hovels, there to exist in horror and a kind of disgusting hopelessness for year after horror-filled year, while I myself rose each morning from my bed of misery and despair and made my way to that cursed edifice where I somehow joined the pale-faced and pale-shirted demon-slaves, laboring at onerous and meaningless tasks, swilling cup after cup of the disgusting brown fluid to which all the demon-slaves swiftly became addicted, forcing myself daily to that terrible place where the trays of blasted matter were served as alleged nourishment, watching with a malign satisfaction whenever a newcomer were lured to join and share our depraved existence and with ill-conceived envy whenever one should contrive to escape. . . .

Until finally, driven nigh upon the farthermost shore of madness by the horror which was my daily fare and by the guilt of having caused such misery to be visited likewise upon my loved ones, I contrived a scheme of abandoning all and, packing my loved ones into a carefully concealed conveyance, stealing away by night and making our way, ere the demon-

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masters could miss us, to some pleasanter spot.

And in my dream, if dream it was, I succeeded, and yet found myself here, provided by my keepers with a soft crayon and floppy-edged papers upon which I record my thoughts, for they encourage me thus to record my thoughts, and assure me that I will yet be well, and will be permitted to return to my family.

And yet I wonder betimes, when a gibbous moon leers balefully and my thoughts turn back to what was, can such places as Dutchess City really be? Do demon-slaves labor at their hopeless tasks and gorge themselves with horrible brown fluid? Was I really one such, and have I really made my escape, or will they come some time in the night, when I am not wary, and by such weird methods of persuasion as my poor feeble brain can not even guess, re-ensnare me and lure me back to that place of horror and despair?

Please God that it be not so!

—Ova Hamlet

(Continued from page 71)

contracted defensively into a ball and fell; then it flattened out to land unseen on the methane snow that should have covered the ground.

It was caught by a strong updraft. Again it projected its two white wings and soared upward, along the face of the building. On the third floor a window was open; the alien followed the draft into the room.

One of its strange senses informed it that the room had recently contained a being like the one it had partially eaten in the park. Everything in the room was tinged with traces of the human's presence. The alien crawled from object to object; it rolled about the room seeking the best place to lie in wait. At last it found the spot that most strongly held the peculiar record of human use recognized by the alien's senses. It climbed up the short distance and waited.

Timmy stood for a moment at the threshold of his room. At their other house the closet had been next to his bed; the monsters had been closer, but so had the light switch. He could reach out from under the protective covers and turn off the light: the only danger was in not jerking his arm back under the sheet quickly enough. But in the new house the light switch was here, by the door, all the way across the room from his bed. He had worked out a deal which allowed him safe passage to his bed until the count of ten. Even though he counted very slowly (he was usually in bed and covered by "three"), he was still afraid. He was never sure that he could trust his monsters.

He took a deep breath. He turned off the light and hurried across the room to his bed.

He grabbed the sheet.

The sheet was *moving* . . .

It felt

—Susan Doenim

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Mrs. Shiras introduced her friend, Mrs. Tokkin, to us in Terry Carr's New Worlds of Fantasy #2, *and continued her narration of Mrs. Tokkin's curious tales in the October, 1971, issue of this magazine. This time Mrs. Tokkin has, as she puts it, "quite an adventure" to relate, for it concerns the basic nature of—*

REALITY

WILMAR H. SHIRAS

"I'M SO GLAD you came over today," I said, pouring tea for Mrs. Tokkin. "I'm so tired, and I've been working so hard, that everything began to take on a dream-like quality."

"You're not feverish at all?" asked Mrs. Tokkin with kindly solicitude. "Sometimes such feelings occur at the onset of influenza."

"No, I'm perfectly well," I said, "but I did need to stop and rest, I think. I had begun to wonder whether the world is real at all."

"That reminds me of a discussion that Paul, my husband, and I were having with our friend the Professor," mused Mrs. Tokkin. "It led to quite an adventure. Would you care to hear about it?"

IT AROSE (said Mrs. Tokkin) out of a remark similar to the one you just made.

"Some people think, or claim to think," said Paul, "that nothing exists but themselves, and that the wold external world is an illusion."

"That sounds like the White King's dream," I observed.

"But I am sure that you exist, and the Professor," said Paul. "Perhaps I could be convinced that I dream up other things, but think how *lonely* absolute egotism must be."

"Then you would refuse to believe it because it would not to pleasant," said the Professor.

"Not to mention the important point that it is not true," said Paul.

"But it might be interesting if all externals were unreal," suggested the Professor. "If only people existed, their spirits. One could be with one's dearest friend and yet each of the two would be living in different parts of the world. Space and time would no longer be barriers."

"Do you mean," I asked, "that Paul and I could both be living in different worlds, or different parts of the same world, and yet be together?"

"Oh, yes," said the Professor, "if there is no physical reality, if all the world is illusion except people's souls."

"If all being is spiritual," said Paul, and he began to grin, "—that would be interesting to try."

"Would you like to try it?" asked the Professor.

We thought perhaps we would, if we

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could return safely to the world as we knew it.

"Remember, then, as spiritual beings, you both exist, but you may become separated if you do not maintain the intention of keeping together. The appearance of the material world will seem real to you, but you will be able to change about in space by an act of the will alone. When you have had enough of it, make contact with me. Now, just to start you off—form the intention of going for a ride together. One—two—three—"

I had only a few seconds to place myself where his words suggested. And there I was, in the hills near Los Gatos, riding a big chestnut horse. Paul was beside me, bouncing along also.

"It's a beautiful day," I said.

"Yes, isn't it?" said Paul. "No fog at all. We can see for miles."

We jogged along in companionable silence for a few moments.

Then I said, "What are you stopping for?"

"The red light," said Paul in some surprise.

"But we are riding together!"

"Yes," he agreed. "I was just going to say, where do you want to go? Around Lake Merritt?"

"Paul, where are you? In Oakland?"

"Of course I'm in Oakland."

"I'm riding a horse in the canyon on Los Gatos, going toward Ann Bowen's house," I said. "We'll be going past her cottage soon, and then up the hill to the place we rented last summer."

"Well, I'm riding in our car," said Paul, "and I'm going around Lake Merritt, and then up the hill to our house, I suppose. So it has already begun. We chose to ride in different places and in different ways, and yet here we are, together. This is fun, isn't it?"

"It would be if you didn't keep stopping. My horse stops whenever yours does."

"I'm not on a horse," said Paul placidly. "I'm driving our car, and you're beside me in the front seat. A little girl in a red sweater ran across in front of me, after a ball."

"I didn't see anyone," I said. "I wonder what would happen if I kept on going when you stopped."

"If I speed up the car, I suppose you'd find yourself galloping," said Paul. "Shall I try it?"

"Not now," I said hastily. "Here's Mrs. Bowen coming up the trail."

Mrs. Bowen waved her hand to me and I waved back. She called a greeting, and I replied. Paul had the funniest look on his face.

"Am I here?" he whispered to me.

"How can you be?" I whispered back.

"I saw her as she spoke. Does she see me?"

By then we had ridden up to Ann Bowen, and she said, "I hadn't known you were in Los Gatos this week-end. And how well you're looking, Paul!"

"Thanks," said Paul huskily. "And how's Bill?"

"Bill's fine. You must come up and have supper with us, tonight, if you'll take pot-luck."

"I'm not sure we'll be able to, Mrs. Bowen," I said.

"Well, come if you can," she answered cheerfully. "There is usually

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something to eat around the place. I won't keep you from your ride now."

That was fortunate, because Paul had already started to move on, and my horse moved also.

"People behind me were honking their horns," said Paul as soon as we were out of earshot. "How can I have met Ann Bowen and talked to her if I'm in Oakland?"

"We're really both in Los Gatos," I said, "riding horses. You only think you are in Oakland."

"Oh, is that so!" said Paul. "I'm going up our street, and I see Mr. Harding ahead. I'm going to offer him a lift up the hill."

Mr. Harding was a neighbor of ours in Oakland.

"You can't see him," I said. "I don't see him. And I didn't see the little girl in the red sweater."

And at that moment Paul stopped, and there was Mr. Harding, taking off his hat.

"Want a lift up the hill?" asked Paul.

"Thank you," said Mr. Harding. "It is quite a pull, isn't it?"

Some sort of conversation followed, but I was too much bewildered to pay attention to it. We stopped again in a minute or two, went on a very short distance, stopped, dismounted, walked up a couple of steps, opened a door, turned a corner and sat down.

"This is wonderful," said Paul. "Tell me what happened, as you saw it."

"Certainly," I said. "We were riding horses in the canyon, just as I said. We met Ann Bowen, and we both talked to her; she invited us to supper at her house, and said she hadn't known we were in Los Gatos this week-end. And then we met Mr. Harding, though what he was doing there I can't imagine, and you took him up on the back of your horse and we rode up the hill trail. You let him off just below Marshalls' cabin, and now we are in the cabin we used to rent."

"Now I'll tell you what really happened," said Paul. "You and I went for a drive around Lake Merritt. We met Mrs. Bowen as you say, and she acted as if we were in Los Gatos, but we were in Oakland, and the traffic lights turned green and then red and then green again and I had to go on. We drove home, and on the way up the hill we met Mr. Harding. I offered him a lift, he got in the back seat of our car, we let him off at his house, and we are now in our own house in Oakland. It feels like lunch time, too. Can you get some lunch ready?"

"I love this," I said. "It is the most fun I've had in a long time. If I get lunch in Los Gatos and you set the table in Oakland, we'll have lunch!"

But when I went into the kitchen of the cabin, there was no food on the shelves.

"The cabin must be vacant," I reported. "After all, I didn't bring any provisions with me. We'll have to get the horses again and ride to town."

"I'll raid the kitchen here," said Paul. "You know darn well there is food in our kitchen here in Oakland. You set the table."

So I set the table in the cabin, and Paul soon came in with scrambled egge, coffee, and toast.

"I can't see how this can be," I said. "I'm eating, but there was nothing in the kitchen."

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"You must be taking my word for it," he said. "But why didn't you see the child in the red sweater? I almost ran over her."

"You didn't take my word for Ann Bowen, and I didn't take your word for Mr. Harding, until we both saw them," I said, "and heard them, when they spoke to us."

"What is real, then?" Paul asked. "Apparently a human being is real to both of us when it makes contact with us, speaking. Or perhaps it has to be a friend we both know."

"These eggs are friends we both know, then," I pointed out, with my mouth full.

"Or maybe it is that in both worlds we maintain the illusion of having to eat lunch."

"Could be," I said. "Horseback riding always gives me a fearful appetite, I know that much. Paul, there is half an apple pie in the kitchen in Oakland, and I can't get it."

"I'll try," he said, and he brought in the pie and served it.

When lunch was over, we thought we would try a change of scene.

"Let's go to Boston together," I proposed. "It is a long while since I have been there."

"All right," said Paul obligingly. "What part of Boston shall we think ourselves into?"

"Franklin Park would be nice," I suggested. "Mind, we must keep the intention of being together."

A wave of homesickness for Boston swept over me, and I shut my eyes. When I opened them, there I was, in Boston, in Franklin Park, standing at the top of a hill. Everything was white with snow, I had a ski-suit on and skis on my feet, and the cold air nipped my nose.

I had not been on skis since I was a girl, but the slope before me was not steep nor long, and down it I went. My skis crossed and I fell, then picked myself up out of a snowbank, laughing like a girl.

But, my dear, if you had seen Paul's face! He came running after me.

"You flew," he said. "You flew! And then you did the most extraordinary gyration and fell—are you hurt?"

"Hurt? Heavens, no. A tumble in deep snow is fun. Why, Paul, what's the matter?"

"Snow?" he said. "So that's it. We must have thought of different seasons. Our timing is all off."

"What season is it with you?"

"If flickers," he said. "One minute I see lilacs in bloom, and the next, maples red with autumn foliage. But when we first came here, I saw you standing on the top of that little hill, with your hair flying in the breeze and your light summer dress fluttering—and you talked of snow!—and then suddenly you flew down the hillside and—"

"What nonsense, Paul," I said. "I'm wearing a ski suit and a fur cap, and so are you."

"I'm nothing of the sort," he said. "And you gave me the fright of my life. Skis! How was I to know?"

"Shall we agree on a season, and go about Boston together?" I asked.

But he said he would rather go back to California, so we agreed to do that, and in California we were, walking along together.

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Then Paul jumped forward.

"What did you do that for?"

"You're wading in the creek," he said. "I jumped it, of course."

"My feet are perfectly dry. I'm on the sidewalk," I said. "Are you in Los Gatos? I thought we were going home."

"Mrs. Bowen asked us to supper," he said. "I thought you would think we'd better go."

"I thought we were walking down to market," I said. "This is so confusing, Paul—I'm getting a little tired of it."

"I've had about enough, too," he said. "But what about Mrs. Bowen's supper? She'll be expecting—*look out!*"

He shouted those last words, and gave me a violent push. It sent me right off the curbstone and into the street. A car put on its brakes just in time, as I fell in front of it. People, including a policeman, came running from everywhere.

"He pushed her—I saw him—he pushed her right in front of that car," they were saying.

The policeman helped me up. My arm was hurt, and I knew my wrist was badly sprained, but I tried to say something quickly before Paul should be in trouble.

"I'm not hurt," I said. "Not hurt at all. He did *not* push me. I started to rush across the street, jaywalking, and he tried to pull me back. He's my husband. I know whether I was pushed! It was all my own fault. I shouldn't have tried to cross in the middle of the block."

And just as they were all beginning to believe me, Paul saw the cause of the disturbance and began to shout, "A rattlesnake! A rattlesnake! Keep away, everybody!"

"He did push her," said a man in the street. "Got the D.T.'s, seems like. Seeing snakes and all."

The officer let go of my arm so suddenly that I almost lost my balance, and he started off towards Paul. But who should pop up but Ann Bowen, brandishing the heavy walking stick she always carries in the woods, and striking with it at the grass and weeds in the vacant lot by the sidewalk.

"Got it," she announced, while we all stood gaping. "There are still too many rattlers in these woods. But every one killed is that much to the good."

"What's going on here?" demanded the officer.

"Sheriff, I saw a rattlesnake," explained Paul.

"He pushed her," said someone in the crowd, again.

"Of course he pushed her," said Mrs. Bowen. "Wouldn't you push your wife if you saw her about to tread on a rattler?"

"Why did she say he didn't, then?" demanded the policeman. "I didn't see any snake. I don't believe there was one."

Nobody could talk to Ann Bowen that way, and on her own land, too. She bristled up instantly, and there we all were, surrounded by a gathering crowd, Paul and I side by side—he in Los Gatos and I in Oakland—and a city cop and a country woman, each on their own ground and fifty miles apart, trying to out-argue each other.

I felt I had plenty and more than plenty.

(Continued on page 123)

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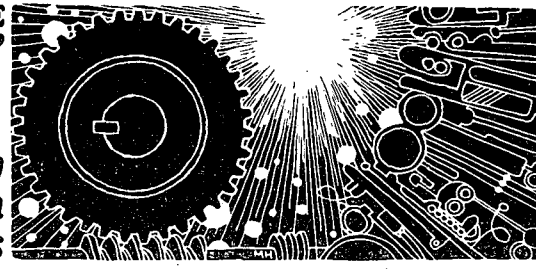
L. SPRAGUE de CAMP

Literary Swordsmen & Sorcerers



TWO MEN IN ONE

A MEDIEVAL IRISH HISTORIAN WROTE: "There be two great robber barons on the road to Drogheda, Dunsany and Fingall; and if you save yourself from the hands of Fingall, you will assuredly fall into the hands of Dunsany." Dunsany (rhymes with "one rainy") is a village 20-odd miles northwest of Dublin, in County Meath, near An Uaimh (pronounced a-NOO-if). For most of the twentieth century, nearby Dunsany Castle was occupied by Edward John Moreton Drax Plunkett, eighteenth Baron Dunsany (1878-1958). Dunsany was an amazing man: soldier, sportsman, hunter, politician, world traveler, writer, novelist, poet, dramatist, artist, lecturer, and one of the strongest influences on modern fantasy.

About 1155, finding the Irish clergy too independent for his taste, Pope Adrian IV (the only English pope) gave Ireland to the brilliant, energetic, and terrible-tempered Henry II of England. There is a question of the authenticity of the grant, but all parties concerned acted as if it were real. While they blame Henry for accepting the gift, the Irish somehow never blame Adrian for making it. They facilitated Henry's takeover when an ousted Irish kinglet went to England and, with Henry's approval, raised a force of Norman adventurers to put him back on his throne. What followed was what had happened long before, on a vaster scale, when the Roman emperors hired German tribesmen as mercenaries, and the Caliphs likewise hired Turks. The Irish have never had a moment's peace since.

One Norman freebooter was John Plunkett, who seized land in County Meath near the sacred hill of Tara, where the High Kings had long been crowned. In the 1440s, John Plunkett's descendant Christopher Plunkett was made Baron Dunsany. The barons of Fingall were another branch of the family.

During the religious conflicts of the seventeenth century, the Dunsanys adhered to the Catholic Church and for two generations after the battle of the Boyne (1690) were exiled. They nonetheless managed by fast footwork to hold on to their property through all the persecutions and confiscations. The usual method in such cases was for one of the family to convert to Protestantism and hold the land in an informal trust for the others. I do not know if the Dunsanys did this or, for that matter, what their present affiliations are.

One of the family was the Blessed Oliver Plunkett, an Irish Catholic archbishop who fell a victim to the Popish Plot hoax engineered in the 1670s by Titus Oates. This Plunkett was hanged, drawn, and quartered on flimsy charges of plotting to land a French army in Ireland. They say he is likely soon to be made a saint.

About 200 years ago, the castle was

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drastically rebuilt. As the Dowager Lady Dunsany (widow of the writer) once told me: "If you're going to modernize a castle, the eighteenth century is the very best time to do it." The present structure is in the Neo-Gothic style of the Romantic Revival, with properly medieval battlements but tall windows instead of arrow slits and hence not medievally defensible. In a final spasm of romanticism, a nineteenth-century Dunsany built a "folly"—a synthetic ruin in the form of a Norman guard tower, with arrow slits—by the front gate. Three television antennae sprout among the battlements of the castle.

Inside, suits of armor stand in corners and paintings by Van Dyck and other masters behang the walls. A sword rack holds a dozen or so dress swords worn by the last two lords during their military careers. There are still a priest hole and a secret stair, from the days of the persecution of Catholics.

THE EIGHTEENTH DUNSANY, the writer, was six feet three or four inches tall, and lean, with large hands and feet. He was sometimes called "the worst-dressed man in Ireland," albeit the frontispiece of his first autobiographical volume, a photograph taken at a fortyish age, shows him in complete formal fox-hunting getup, with white stock, red double-breasted tailcoat, white breeches, and black boots. In youth he wore a short mustache, to which he added a somewhat straggly goatee or imperial in eld. A man of lively, enthusiastic spirit and extraordinary versatility, he was esteemed by those who liked him as genial, delightful, fascinating—"a grand man" as a working-class Englishman who had known him said to me. My colleague Lin Carter, who heard him lecture in New York, wrote:

> . . . the old baron, then in his seventy-sixth year, was tall, lean, erect, with twinkling frosty eyes, apple cheeks and a white little spike of a goatee. He wore a completely shapeless gray tweed suit whose baggy pockets were stuffed with scraps of paper, and he had a soft white silk shirt on, with a loose, floppy *foulard.* He spoke in a rich, resonant voice wherein just the slightest Irish lilt sang.[1]

A man of strong personality is never liked by everybody, and those who did not like Dunsany found him arrogant, opinionated, and sometimes testy and inconsiderate. When I asked one who had known him well whether he had been an easy man to live with, the reply was an emphatic: "No! He was the artist . . . completely absorbed . . ."

Dunsany had strong opinions on many subjects. He esteemed Walter de la Mare as the greatest living Anglophone poet but denounced the turgid free verse, which most poets have written from mid-century on, as obscure and as "bells of lead." He had positive ideas as to how prose should be written and said: "I can't think of any great prose writers who have come up to the standards I have set for prose." He deemed Irish English superior to the standard upper-class Southern British accent on which he had been reared.

BORN IN LONDON, Dunsany spent much of his childhood at his mother's home, a Regency house in Kent called Dunstall Priory, doubtless because a monastery once stood there. Educated at Cheam School, Eton, and Sandhurst (the British West Point), young Plunkett lost his father the year he graduated from Sandhurst and succeeded to the title. He was commissioned in the Coldstream Guards and sent to duty at Gibraltar. There he took long rides about the countryside, gathering impressions that he later used in his Spanish fantasies, *Don Rodriguez* and *The Charwoman's Shadow.*

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(These impressions do not seem to have included much knowledge of Spanish, judging from the way he mangled the tongue in his stories.)

In the Boer War, Dunsany fought in the battles of Graspan and Modder River. His younger brother went into the Navy and at last became Admiral Sir Reginald Drax-Plunkett. In August, 1939, Neville Chamberlain sent Admiral Drax as head of the ill-fated British mission to Moscow in the forlorn hope of forming an alliance with Stalin against Hitler.[2]

Back home, Dunsany retired from the army, married the slender and beautiful Lady Beatrice Villers, daughter of the Earl of Jersey, and lived happily—if not ever after, at least to a ripe age. They had one son, Randal Arthur Henry Plunkett, who (as the nineteenth baron) is now a retired lieutenant-colonel of the Guides Cavalry of the Indian Army. Tall, tweedy, mustached, monocled, and snuff-taking, the present baron commanded an armored-car unit at the battle of El Alamein. ("The four-wheel drive," he says, "has abolished the impassable desert. We proved that.") He is active in Dublin's literary and artistic circles, owns a marina, and is restoring a ruined Welsh castle as a tourist attraction. His son, the Hon. Edward John Carlos Plunkett, is an artist living in Rome.

Dunsany took enthusiastically to the fox-hunting, shooting, partying, games-playing life of the country gentry. But about 1903 the scenario, which had typed him as a typical Anglo-Irish country squire, began to go awry. He began to write dreamy little stories about gods and godlets and heroes in imaginary worlds. The first began:

> Before there stood gods upon Olympus, or ever Allah was Allah, had wrought and rested MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI.
>
> There are in Pegana—Mung and Shish and Kib, and the maker of all small gods, who is MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI. Moreover, we have a faith in Roon and Slid.
>
> And it has been said of old that all things that have been were wrought by the small gods, excepting only MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI, who made the gods, and hath thereafter rested.
>
> And none may pray to MANA-YOOD-SUSHAI but only the gods whom he hath made . . .

Whatever Dunsany's personal religious convictions or lack of them, no trace of them appears in his stories. He wrote with a quill pen—a habit that persisted most of his life—or else dictated to his wife. In 1905 he found a publisher willing, if subsidized, to bring out a volume of these exotic vignettes. The book, *The Gods of Pegāna,* made Dunsany some literary reputation, and he never again resorted to vanity publishing. He continued to write all his long life and turned out over sixty volumes, including short stories, novels, plays, poems, and memoirs.

He said that, actually, he had spent ninety-odd per cent of his adult life in sport and soldiering, giving only odd moments to writing; but this may have been a gentlemanly pose. He did write fast, and he said: "I never rewrite and I never correct." If this be true, his brilliantly polished prose must have been the product of a mind with the enviable power of organizing and editing everything he wrote before it got to paper.

So Dunsany pursued a kind of Jekyll-Hyde existence, as a fashionable sporting aristocrat and as a serious littérateur. Since he did not talk about his writings to his horsy, unintellectual titled friends and kinsmen, many were unaware of these writings after Dunsany had been publishing for years. He was like two men in one, each having his own activities, interests, and circle of friends with hardly any overlap.

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In the literary world, on the other hand, he found that, so far from his title's being an advantage, "I have found it to be of the greatest disadvantage; and all critics who have concentrated on the cover of a book, where the writing is large and clear and quickly read, have been inclined to take the line that here was an aristocratic idler designing to take the bread out of the mouths of honest men."[1] This inverted snobbery infuriated him but also, probably, stimulated him. Having once made a reputation as "Lord Dunsany," it would have been impractical to change his by-line to "Edward Plunkett."

In looking for an illustrator for his stories, Dunsany had been impressed by the drawings of Sidney H. Sime. He was lucky to find Sime alive, active, and willing. Dunsany's stories and Sime's pictures, the originals of which hang today on the walls of Dunsany Castle, complemented each other perfectly. Sometimes Dunsany would ask Sime to draw a fantastic picture and then write a story around it. "The Distressing Tale of Thangobrind the Jeweller" was thus begotten.

In 1905, while the 27-year-old Dunsany was staying in Wiltshire, Conservative friends asked him to stand for Parliament. Since his father had been an active and eloquent M.P., Dunsany was willing. He found he enjoyed making speeches but lost anyway. After continuing active for a few years in that district, he decided that he was away too much to do the party justice and quit politics.

Dunsany alternated between Dunstall Priory and Dunsany Castle. He played chess and cricket and continued to write. In 1908-09 he made a trip to Egypt. In Dublin he became involved with the Abbey Theatre, the Irish Renaissance, and William Butler Yeats. Although he and Yeats had many interests in common; they did not get on well; Dunsany thought that Yeats shared the common prejudice against titled dilettantes. Yeats organized an Irish Academy of Letters and ostentatiously omitted Dunsany on the ground that Dunsany wrote about imaginary lands, not about Ireland. But there was no real feud, and when they met in later years they treated each other pleasantly enough.

At this time, Dunsany wrote the stories comprising one of his best collections of fantasy, *The Book of Wonder* (1912) and two of his most successful plays: *The Gods of the Mountain* and *King Argimēnēs and the Unknown Warrior,* along with several other plays. Several of these plays were produced in London and in Dublin with gratifying success and were paid the compliment of being pirated in Tsarist Russia; some things change little. The real success of these plays, however, came later and in the United States.

In 1912, Dunsany went hunting wild goats in the Sahara. His guide insisted on what a healthy place the desert was. "The Arabs of the desert are never ill," quoth Smail ben-Ibrahim. "If an Arab is ill he dies." Next year, Dunsany hunted big game in East Africa. In later years, he sometimes wondered how one who loved wild nature as he did should also enjoy killing game.

THEN CAME AUGUST, 1914. Dunsany volunteered for the Iniskilling Fusiliers in Ireland. Captain Dunsany was still training his company when the Easter Rising of 1916 broke out. Dunsany and a fellow officer drove back from the Castle to Dublin. but ran into a street barricade manned by a company of the Irish Republican Army. These rose up and began shooting, making up in volume what they lacked in marksmanship. Dunsany's car was riddled. While running for cover, Dunsany was hit in the face by a ricochet, which lodged in his nasal sinuses. A rebel took Dunsany prisoner and, seeing the blood flow, said: "I

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am sorry." His comrades cried: "Where's a doctor? Here's a man bleeding to death!"

Dunsany was put in a hospital and tenderly cared for until the rebellion was crushed. His companion, Lindsay, was a domineering man with a knack for taking charge of things. When taken as a prisoner to the Four Courts, "he asked to be shewn the plans of the Sinn Fein Army. These were shewn him, and brushing them aside with the same excess of confidence in which I had seen him indulge in the presence of his own senior officers, he said: 'Those plans are no good. You'd better surrender.' And they did."[4]

By the end of that year, Dunsany was on duty in France in the most dismal of all wars. In reference to his own towering stature, he later remarked: "Our trenches were only six feet deep; I shall never fear publicity again."

He survived the war without further damage and in 1919 made the first of a number of lecture tours to America, where he found that readers appreciated him more than did his own countrymen. Sometimes he had to flee back across the Atlantic to escape American hospitality, fearing lest he should never get any more writing done. His plays, too, took hold in the New World; at one time he had five running at once on Broadway.

Once a young Irish workingman came to Dunsany and said he had gotten on the wrong side of the IRA, and that he was due to be murdered if Dunsany could not lend him two pounds to help him across the sea. Dunsany paid and thought no more of it. Many years later, when Dunsany was lecturing in Canada, a ruddy, prosperous, middle-aged man came up and said: "Here's the two pounds I owe you."

Dunsany hunted in Algeria and the Sudan (where he got the setting for some of his Jorkens stories), and he and his wife made a trip to India to visit son Randal. Naturally, they moved in the most exalted circles. The Dowager Lady Dunsany (his widow) once wrote me about India:

> It has evidently changed since I last saw it over 30 years ago, but even so I can hardly believe the letter from an Indian friend who said that their great difficulty was getting good domestic staff, when I remember servants in swarms all over the place, sleeping on marble palace stairs and appearing as by magic when one's hosts clapped their hands.

In 1924, Dunsany won the chess championship of Ireland. He once played the invincible Capablanca to a draw. He became a friend of Kipling, Elgar, and other eminences and went with H. G. Wells on a literary junket to Czechoslovakia.

He took up drawing, painting, and sculpture. His weird drawings may be compared to Clark Ashton Smith's—talented primitives, but some quite effective. His painting of a formal flower garden was touched up and corrected by Augustus St. John. His sculpture was a series of terra cotta figurines, mostly of men in fantastic uniforms, comparable to Smith's soapstone carvings. Dunsany learned by trial and error how to bake his statuettes.

As war again approached, Dunsany drew obloquy upon himself by predicting it and urging preparedness. In some of his earliest stories, he had not been above taking a few sly cracks at the Jews. Witness the vulgar parvenu, Lord Castlenorman, who appears in "How Nuth would have Practised his Art upon the Gnoles" and "The Bird of the Difficult Eye," and at whose residence "Saturday was observed as Sabbath." As I have set forth elsewhere, this attitude was very common among Gentile writers of Dunsany's gen-

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eration. Later, especially after the rise of Hitler, Dunsany swung round (somewhat as Lovecraft did) and became a sympathizer with and defender of the Jews.

When the Hitlerian War broke out, Dunsany moved from Ireland back to Kent and joined the Home Guard. In 1940, the government persuaded him, as a good-will gesture, to give a course on English literature at the University of Athens. He got there by a roundabout way, via South Africa, and began lecturing. Then the Germans overran Greece. The Dunsanys escaped on a refugee-crammed ship just ahead of the conquerors, Dunsany wearing two hats because he saw no reason to abandon either to the foe.

When the Dunsanys finally got home, they moved back to Ireland and "gradually settled down to grow old there." Dunsany made a few more American trips and died quietly at 79, in a nursing home in Dublin.

LOVECRAFT ONCE CALLED Dunsany's work: "Unexcelled in the sorcery of crystalline singing prose, and supreme in the creation of a gorgeous and languorous world of iridescently exotic vision . . ."[5] which is a pretty iridescent piece of crystalline prose in itself. Some of Dunsany's tales are laid in Ireland, some in an Africa odder than anything thought up by Edgar Rice Burroughs, and some in never-never lands of his own creation. He constantly threw off quotably epigrammatic sentences: "The Gibbelins eat, as is well known, nothing less good than man"; or "To be a god and to fail to achieve a miracle is a despairing sensation; it is as though among men one should determine upon a hearty sneeze and as though no sneeze should come"; or "It does not become adventurers to care who eats their bones."[6]

He wrote over a period of half a century and got better as he did so. Although his stories were always told in richly poetic language (based, he said, upon extensive Bible reading) some early ones failed to support the peerless prose with any particular point or plot. Later, he pruned away pointless anecdotes and rhetorical extravagances.

At least a dozen of Dunsany's books contain stories in the genre of heroic fantasy or something very close to it. First came nine volumes of collections of plays and short stories, all published before 1920 and practically all written before or during the Kaiserian War: *The Book of Wonder, A Dreamer's Tales, Five Plays, The Gods of Pegāna, Plays of Gods and Men, The Sword of Welleran, Tales of Three Hemispheres, Tales of Wonder,* and *Time and the Gods.*

After that war, Dunsany undertook to write novels, which he had never done. (He went at each new branch of the arts, as he got around to it, as if he were putting his horse at a high fence on a hunt.) In 1922 he published *Don Rodriguez: Chronicles of Shadow Valley* (also sometimes called *The Chronicles of Rodriguez).* This is a novel of Spain in that indefinite period called the Golden Age, with a gallant if somewhat naive hidalgo, his Sancho-Panzalike servant, and a professor of magic.

Two years later appeared *The King of Elfland's Daughter,* the most swordly and sorcerous of all Dunsany's works. It tells of Alveric, the son of the lord of Erl, who weds the king of Elfland's daughter and gets a son but then is separated from her and spends many tragic years searching (rather ineptly, it must be admitted) for her. Like many Britons of his generation, Dunsany thought hunting the world's most fascinating occupation and gives it more space than non-hunters and wildlife lovers are likely to find pleasurable. *The King of Elfland's Daughter* is a splendid fantasy novel in a class with Pratt's *The Well of the Unicorn* and the Tolkien

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trilogy; but it still gets bogged down in lengthy accounts of the hunting of deer and unicorns. This is all part of the internal conflict between Dunsany's literary bent and the environment of unbookish, hunting-shooting Anglo-Irish gentry in which he was brought up, and which made Dunsany what he was.

In 1926, he produced a semi-sequel to *Don Rodriguez*. This was *The Charwoman's Shadow,* laid in the same imaginary Spanish setting, in which a minor character is a descendant of the original Don Rodriguez.

Dunsany went on to write many more books, including collections of verse, novels of Irish life, and assortments of non-heroic fantasies, such as *The Man Who Ate the Phoenix* and the four volumes of Jorkens stories. (All Dunsany's short heroic fantasies belong to his earlier period.) Some of his later stories are extremely amusing. Many are laid in modern England or Ireland. He wrote novels of modern Irish life and three volumes of autobiography: *Patches of Sunlight, While the Sirens Slept,* and *The Sirens Wake.* (He meant air-raid sirens, not the kind that beguiled Odysseus.) These are leisurely, charming reminiscences. They are full of delightful anecdotes, like the tale of the man who, during Prohibition, landed in New York from a liner with a hamper among his baggage.

> To the Customs officer he said: "Please don't open that, as I have a very valuable cat inside, and it might escape."
>
> "We know all about that cat," said the officer; "Open it."
>
> So the traveller opened the hamper. Out leaped a cat and rushed away down the platform. The traveller ran after it with the empty hamper, and a long while after returned.
>
> "I asked you not to open it," he said.
>
> "I know that," said the officer; "but we have to deal with all sorts of people. Got your cat all right?"
>
> "Yes, I got her at last," said the traveller. And no more was said. The cat was the ship's cat. And when it got out it ran straight to the ship, and the man with the hamper after it. But when he got to the ship he didn't put the cat into the hamper: he filled that hamper with bottles of whiskey.[7]

Although he had predecessors, such as the many exploiters of Arthurian legend and the lost-Atlantis theme, Dunsany was the second writer (William Morris in the 1880s being the first) fully to exploit the possibilities of heroic fantasy—adventurous fantasy laid in imaginary lands with pre-industrial settings, with gods, witches, spirits, and magic, like children's fairy tales but on a sophisticated, adult level. He was a master of the trick or surprise ending. The dauntless hero sometimes meets an ironic or gruesome fate: "And, without saying a word, *or even smiling,* they neatly hanged him on the outer wall—and the tale is one of those that have not a happy ending."[8]

Dunsany was a writer's writer. Although well known in his lifetime and having much influence on his younger colleagues, he never became an actual best seller, even though several of his plays had considerable success.

As an example of his influence, the eloquent contemporary scientific writer Loren Eiseley, author of *The Firmament of Time, Darwin's Century,* and so on, acknowledges Dunsany's influence. Dunsany's play *King Argimēnēs and the Unknown Warrior* served as a springboard for the distinguished novel *The Well of the Unicorn* by Fletcher Pratt (originally published under the pseudonym "George U. Fletcher"). The Jorkens stories, about a cadging old clubman who tells tall tales for his drinks, started a cycle

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of stories of fantastic barroom reminiscence, such as Arthur C. Clarke's White Hart stories, Pratt's and my Gavagan's Bar tales, and Sterling Lanier's stories of Brigadier Donald Ffellowes.

Dunsany's influence on Lovecraft was fully acknowledged by the latter. Clark Ashton Smith also read Dunsany in his youth, and his stories often show a marked resemblance to Dunsany's, although Smith himself did not think that Dunsany had much influenced him. Poe, Bierce, and Chambers, he said, had had a much more formative effect. In any case, Lovecraft and Smith influenced Howard, who may or may not have read Dunsany at first hand. So if Howard is Conan's father, Dunsany is his great-grandfather.

Dunsany's influence is not a matter of accident but partly the result of study of the craft of writing. He delivered lectures and wrote articles on writing techniques. He fulminated against such sloppy usages as "weather conditions" (a tautology, because weather *is* a condition) or "our Rome correspondent" (for "our Roman correspondent").

His lack of the widest popular success, on the other hand, may be traced to several causes. One is his fondness for exotic made-up names. Thus "The Sword of Welleran" begins: "Where the great plain or Tarphet runs up, as the sea in estuaries, among the Cyresian mountains, there stood long since the city of Merimna well-nigh among the shadows of the crags" and ends: "But back from the ramparts and beyond the mountains and over the lands that they had conquered of old, beyond the world and back again to Paradise, went the souls of Welleran, Soorenard, Mommolek, Rollory, Akanax, and young Iraine." Some find these names romantically evocative; others, especially those who learned to read by look-and-say methods, are exasperated by these unfamiliar word-shapes.

Another cause of Dunsany's lack of greater popular readership is the fact that in many of his earlier stories, poetic eloquence conceals a lack of solid substance. Then, Dunsany shared the decline of fantasy that took place in the 1940s and 50s. For a while, all fantasy seemed to have fallen victim to the machine age. But this trend was reversed by the appearance of Tolkien's trilogy and by the revival of Howard's Conan stories in paperback.

It is good to be able to report that Dunsany, too, is being reprinted in paperback. His stories are a necessary possession for any lover of fantasy; and, like first-rate poetry, they are endlessly rereadable. Those who have not read them have something to look forward to.

NOTES:

1. Lin Carter (ed.): *New Worlds for Old* (1971), p. 125.
2. For this mission, see William L. Shirer: *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich,* Ch. xv.
3. Dunsany: *While the Sirens Slept* (1944), p. 62.
4. Dunsany: *Patches of Sunlight* (1938), p. 274.
5. H. P. Lovecraft: "Supernatural Horror in Literature," in *The Outsider and Others,* p. 549.
6. From, respectively, "The Hoard of the Gibbelins," "Chu-Bu and Sheemish," and "The Probable Adventure of the Three Literary Men."
7. *While the Sirens Slept,* p. 93.
8. From "The Hoard of the Gibbelins."

—L. SPRAGUE DECAMP

COMING ON SALE IN MARCH AMAZING MIRIAM ALLEN DEFORD'S GREATEST NEW NOVELET, PROJECT XX.

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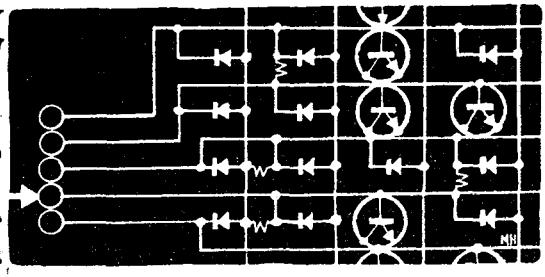
ALEXEI & CORY PANSHIN

SF in Dimension



METAPHOR, ANALOGY, SYMBOL AND MYTH

SOMETHING UNIQUE, important and unidentified is going on in sf, something that isn't present in other contemporary literature. This something is the reason that a crude romance like *The Skylark of Space* continues to survive more than fifty years after it was written, while the countless bestsellers of its day, like the novels of contemporary society by Robert W. Chambers, are today forgotten. This something is the reason that novels like *Fourth Mansions* and *The Left Hand of Darkness* will retain currency when bestsellers of our own day like *Ship of Fools* and *Portnoy's Complaint* are dead. This something explains why the mimetic short story is already dead while the sf short story flourishes. This something explains the continuing and growing audience for sf. This something explains why writers of talent like Barth, Nabokov and Fowles turn from writing in mimetic terms to writing sf. This something explains why young writers of ambition like Disch, LeGuin, Russ and Silverberg should work in sf as their preferred medium.

The standard interpretation of sf from 1926 to the present, the sum of all the myriad half-overlapping definitions of the genre that have been proposed, is that sf is science fiction, a literature closely and necessarily connected in some fashion to science; that it is realistic and deals in the possible; that it is not fantasy; and that its main point is to serve as a literature of ideas.

In the first place, this is not true. A close comparison of the actualities of published sf with our traditional assumptions about the genre shows that the standard paradigm fails on every one of these points. There is more to sf than ideas. Sf is fantasy. It is not mimetic. And it has no necessary connection to science. Even James Blish, one of the strongest present proponents of the traditional theory of sf, admits, "Not one science-fiction story in several thousand involves anything closer to science than minor technological innovations." If this is true—and at most it is an overstatement—it means that the traditional theory cannot be true.

In the second place, the traditional paradigm does not explain what that unique and important something at the heart of sf is. It cannot. This paradigm assumes that mimetic fiction is somehow "more real" and "more true" than fantasy, and it tries to salvage a case for sf by making it into a kind of mimetic fiction. But sf is not mimetic. In fact, the best definition of the genre that we have been able to propose—that is, the definition most adequate to the actualities of the sf that has been published since

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1926—is this: Speculative fantasy is fiction which employs a narrative strategy of crucial exception to the mimetic world.

To understand this definition, and the consequences of the kind of fiction it produces, we have to inquire into the nature and uses of literature in general. What is the point of literature? What does it do for those who read and write it? What is the point of art? Why is it made? What needs does it satisfy?

As living beings, we are faced with a complex universe that we can never totally perceive or totally understand. In order to function, in order to live, in order to survive, we must do the best we can with what we are able to discover about the world. Our sensory perceptions of our local universe give us the information we need to feed ourselves, to move around without falling down or bumping into large objects, and to reproduce our kind.

As higher mamals with superior integrative abilities, we are able to go beyond the perceptions of the moment—our awareness of objects and conditions: e.g. "The sun is shining."—and to relate what we perceive to other perceptions, including our own past perceptions and the reported perceptions of others. Ideas are the various relations we hypothesize to exist between objects and conditions: e.g. "The sun has dried the grass." Feelings are the relations we hypothesize between external objects or conditions and our internal emotional states: e.g. "The sun makes me glad."

Our individual conceptual universes are the sum of our perceptions, our ideas and our feelings. Artistic activity is a mirror for our conceptual universes in which we reflect the current state of our synthesis. Art provides us all with comfort, information and entertainment in our isolation, and it allows the artist the opportunity to, shall we say, get his head together.

Since art is a synthetic activity, it must deal with some combination of perception, thought and feeling. It may deal with all three at once. Some art does. Or it may suppress one factor of the three, the better to show one or both of the factors that are not suppressed.

For instance, art may consider perception as modified by feeling, and suppress idea. An example of this mimetic-aesthetic mode in fiction is a James Bond thriller. What is important here is excitement and suspense within some simulacrum of the mimetic world. What cannot be expected are serious ideas. Subtleties of political theory, for instance, were they present, would be an interfering irrelevance that would blunt the excitement.

Art may also consider perception as modified by thought, and suppress feeling. *Catch-22* is an example of this mimetic-didactic mode in fiction. What is important in this book is ideas, again within the context of a simulation of the ordinary world of experience. That patient swathed head to foot in white bandages is a thought construct, not an object for pity. Anyone who gets too emotional about this book, who starts *caring,* is reading it wrong and will surely get burnt fingers.

Finally, art may deal in terms of feeling and idea, with the particularities of mimetic perception as the suppressed factor. This last, in terms of literature, is what we have said that speculative fantasy does: "Speculative fantasy is fiction which employs a narrative strategy of crucial exception to the mimetic world."

Why suppress mimetic perception? The better to see ideas and feelings. Mimetic particularities are insistent on their primacy. Because they are so very particular, so much a matter of single moments and special places, they may interfere with the integrative processes of thought and feeling. They may interfere with larger pictures of the universe. By dispensing with

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particular particulars, sf is able to talk about universal and epitomal cases. Something is surrendered. Something is gained.

Our standard best example is my (Alexei's) novel, *Rite of Passage.* When I began the book in 1961, a parallel between the basic situation of powerful scientifically advanced ships and powerless retarded Colony Planets that I premised, and the Have and Have-Not nations, occurred to me. When I gave the book to Chip Delany to read in manuscript in the summer of 1967, however, that parallel didn't occur to him. He thought it was "too obviously" about the blacks and whites in America. Some six months later, when I was proofreading the galleys of the novel at the time of the Tet Offensive, it struck me that anyone reading the book would necessarily think it was about the U.S. in Vietnam. Finally, when the book was published, one of the first reviews of it that I saw said, "In reading *Rite of Passage,* I was reminded of the Sephardim and Ashkenazim in Israel. I wonder if Panshin had this in mind?"

One might say that all of these situations had been somewhere in my mind. One might say that it would be absolutely right for any of them or for any number of others to legitimately occur to a reader. What I was truly interested in writing about was not the details of any single situation. If I had written about any one of them, the resultant novel would have been principally about the Sephardim and Ashkenazim, or the U.S. and Vietnam, and a reader coming to it would necessarily have been forced to react in terms of his feelings and ideas about that particular situation. I was interested in writing about the idea of the relationship between people with a great deal of power and people with none, and about how it feels to be allied with the abuse of power. The essence of the feeling. The essence of the idea. Not particularities. Universal and epitomal cases, not the taste and smell of any single mimetic actuality.

Another way of defining sf, then, consistent with our first definition, might be: Speculative fantasy is fiction in which a synthesis of feeling and idea is primary, and particular perception is secondary.

Particular perception is secondary. If it interferes with the integrative processes of thought and feeling, out it goes. But integrations still require some sort of specifics as building blocks. In speculative fantasy this means that those particularities are used that are convenient to use, and those that are inconvenient are replaced with theoretical or *ad hoc* particulars. If none of the details of a fiction seem recognizable, however, the whole will be rejected. Therefore, sf will tend to use that maximum of mimetic particularities consistent with the primary idea or feeling that is being expressed.

This may partly explain what science has been doing in sf all these years. Much or most scientific activity lies beyond the realm of direct perception. "Science" as an invocation is at the same time a promise of the most particular of particularities—impressively certain numbers, quantity and quality stripped bare—and a promise of the unknowns that lie beyond our reach. Science can be particular and exact without being mimetic. Sf, in invoking science, makes claim to being particular and exact without having to deal in constricting familiarities. The "science" in sf is both a body of actuality, fact and theory, and a handy metaphor to serve as a substitute for the actual.

Since 1926, sf has invented a great arsenal of concretized metaphors to serve in the stead of our familiar mimetic paraphernalia. New territories: the future, other planets, parallel universes and other

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dimensions. Transportation devices: spaceships, time machines, matter transmitters. Communication devices: instant translators, telepathy. Political units: everything up to Galactic Empires, everything down to small post-atomic-war bands. Whole populaces of aliens, mutants and robots to serve in varying relationships to humanity.

It does not matter whether any or all of these are likely or unlikely, possible or impossible. They are metaphors. They are literary constructs, and used in a steady and self-consistent manner they more than adequately serve a literary function.

It is one point of the standard paradigm of sf that science fiction is a literature of ideas. There is much truth to this, as we have been saying here. The prevalence of one-word titles in sf is no accident. Here are a few from the MIT Index to give you the flavor of the point: "Adaptation" (three of them), "Adjustment" (two), "Adversity", "Alien" (two, plus two "The Alien"), "Amateur", Arbiter", "Artifact" (two, plus one "The Artifact"), "Asylum" (three, none of them the famous story by van Vogt), "Atonement", "Attitudes", "Attrition" (two), and "Automation". This sort of title is simply not found in mimetic fiction, as a comparative check of the *Short Story Index* shows.

But this is not what is meant by the statement that sf is a literature of ideas. What is meant is these metaphors, this vocabulary of substitutions. SF has spent much of its primary energies during the past forty-five years in inventing and developing this vocabulary. Story after story has been concerned with the consequences and implications of, as an example, time travel, ringing through all the possible changes of the metaphor. So it can be said, perhaps, that science fiction has been a literature of ideas. But they are not what sf is really about. If they were, sf would be trivial. These metaphors are merely its devices, its means, and the necessary concentration upon them until now is evidence of sf's immaturity. Further metaphors will be invented in the future as the need for them arises, but the chief energies of speculative fantasy will be directed elsewhere. That is a certainty.

Let us take stock here for a moment. So far we have identified what speculative fantasy is. It is didactic-aesthetic fiction, dealing primarily in ideas and feelings, which substitutes concretized metaphor for mimetic detail wherever necessary or convenient. This explains what the fiction is, but it doesn't yet identify the sources of its power. We haven't yet gotten to the mysterious something that entices writers and compels readers.

This something is both mysterious and quite wonderful. It is nothing less than three distinct levels of psychic engagement, only one of which is ordinarily even partially available to the conscious mind. We call these the levels of analogy, symbol and myth. They are the direct result, the necessary end, and the point of the special nature of speculative fantasy. They are intensely meaningful and psychically useful. At the same time, they are so deeply buried and at such cross-purposes with everything assumed by the traditional paradigm of sf that they have not previously been identified.

We know of just three critics who have worked even glancingly in these areas. In each case, that work has been little more than a contention that the buried meanings of which we speak do exist and not the true and complete dissection necessary for understanding and belief. But in the first two cases in particular, that work has been a foundation and a stimulus for us.

The earliest of these critics was Damon Knight. His essay into this area was origi-

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nally published in 1957 and was reprinted as Chapter 26, "Symbolism", in the Second Edition of *In Search of Wonder.* It is tremendously provocative and in part mistaken, and the response Knight received at the time was apparently quite discouraging. Second, there was C. M. Kornbluth, who acknowledges a debt to Knight, in a lecture, "The Failure of the Science Fiction Novel as Social Criticism", delivered at the University of Chicago in 1957 and reprinted in *The Science Fiction Novel.* This essay is even more brilliant and fruitful than Knight's. And finally, in recent times, there has been the provocatively titled but disappointingly superficial 1968 book, *The Emotional Significance of Imaginary Beings,* by the psychologist, Robert Plank, who is everywhere less stimulating than Knight and Kornbluth.

Before we start analyzing these levels of analogy, symbol and myth, let us demonstrate that there is something to analyze. The best way is to examine a story that makes no sense whatsoever on any overt level, a story that is incoherent, inconsistent, immature, badly-written and stupid—but that still retains the power to move readers. Fortunately for our purposes, there is such a book. It is *The World of Null-A* by A. E. van Vogt. The jacket of the most recent edition quotes Groff Conklin as saying, "Without doubt one of the most exciting, continuously complex and richly patterned science fiction novels ever written," and John W. Campbell as saying, "One of those once-in-a-decade classics." Damon Knight, on the other hand, says in *In Search of Wonder,* "I offer the alternate judgment that, far from being a 'classic' by any reasonable standard, *The World of A* is one of the worst allegedly-adult science fiction stories ever published."

Who is right? The answer is, all three. By the "reasonable" standards that Knight applies to the plot, characterization, background and style of this novel, it is every bit as inept as he says that it is. Van Vogt even admits as much in an "Author's Introduction" to the 1970 Berkley paperback edition of *The World of Null-A.* He says that because of Knight's attack, he has specially revised the novel. Even so, as we shall see, it hasn't helped much. On the other hand, Conklin and Campbell are not wrong. *The World of Null-A* made a powerful impression when it was first published in 1945. Since its original magazine serialization, it has had at least two American hardcover editions and two American paperback editions. And it still has impact today. It was one of only thirty books that as many as five of the eight critics nominated for the SFWA Bibliography of classic science fiction published in the June 15, 1970 issue of *Library Journal*—and Damon Knight was one of those five. And still, Knight remains as right in his criticisms as he was when he first wrote them. So—something interesting is going on here.

With a book as vulnerable to criticism as this one is, it would be possible to fire at it with a shotgun and hit it in a dozen unprotected areas. Let us restrict ourselves to three points: the nature and character of the hero, Gilbert Gosseyn; the nature of the plot; and the great thought system that provides the philosophical underpinning for *The World of Null-A.*

First the system. Van Vogt has always been fond of building his stories on top of ideational systems. And, as we have pointed out, this didacticism is a basic element in speculative fantasy. However, in van Vogt's hands, the systems he invokes are not used for their real world purposes. They become magical devices to be used in whatever fashion is convenient for van Vogt. In van Vogt's earliest

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stories, collected as *The Voyage of the Space Beagle,* the system is not Darwinism, as one might be excused for guessing. It is Spenglarian cyclical history. With it as a weapon, van Vogt's intrepid explorers need fear nothing. As the conclusion of the first of these stories, "Black Destroyer", has it: " 'It was history, honorable Mr. Smith, our knowledge of history that defeated him,' said the Japanese archeologist, reverting to the ancient politeness of his race." In a mercifully forgotten 1946 magazine serial, *The Chronicler,* the hero is enabled by a judicious use of the Bates system of eye exercises to travel into another dimension where everyone has three eyes, just like him, a result undreamed of by Dr. Bates.

The system in *The World of Null-A* is General Semantics. In the year 2560 A.D., General Semantics is king. It takes ordinary men, crippled by their Aristotelian black-white either-or habits of thought, and turns them into supermen able to see a thousand shades of gray. In this story, General Semantics is top trump. Whenever there is an impasse, all a character need do is say the magic words, "General Semantics" or "Hah, Aristotelian thinking!", and quick as Dristan all blockages are cleared. It is van Vogt's contention that he has not only presented the facts of General Semantics "well" and "skilfully" in *The World of Null-A,* but that he has built the novel itself by Korzybskian principles as well, dramatizing the essence of General Semantics.

In fact, however, he has done nothing of the kind. For all the allusions to General Semantics, absolutely nothing of the reality of the system is presented. Anybody attempting to pass a college quiz in the subject on the basis of this novel would be lucky to get 5%. And here, in two quotations from the thinking of Gilbert Gosseyn, the Null-A superman, is an indication of how deep the non-Aristotelian multi-valued understructure of the novel actually is:

First. "Gosseyn considered that. Like all the happenings in spacetime, this one was packed with unseen and unseeable factors. A young woman, different from all the other young women in the universe [there is your Null-A thought for you], had come running in terror from a side street. Her terror was either real or it was assumed. Gosseyn's mind skipped the harmless possibility and fastened upon the probability that her appearance was a trick. He pictured a small group waiting around the corner, anxious to share in the spoils of a policeless city, yet not willing to take the risk of a direct assault. He felt coldly, unsympathetically suspicious. Because if she was harmless, what was she doing out alone on such a night?" And there is your Null-A thought for you.

Second, so you won't think that this first example was merely a single forgiveable mistake. "The moment they broke into the open, two guards raced toward them, shrieking something that was lost in the bedlam. Their contorted faces were limned in the fitful light. Their guns waved ferociously. And they went down like briefly animated dummies as Gosseyn shot them. He ran on after Lyttle, startled. He who had so frequently refused to kill—merciless now. The guards were symbols, he decided bleakly, symbols of destruction. Having taken on unhuman qualities, they were barbarous entities, to be destroyed like attacking beasts and forgotten. He forgot them." And *there* is your Null-A thought for you.

Next, let us look at the plot of *The World of Null-A* for a moment. In an essay entitled "Complication in the Science Fiction Story" published in the 1947 symposium, *Of Worlds Beyond,* van Vogt recommends a unique method of story construction. He says, "Think of it

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in scenes of about 800 words. This is not original with me, but I have followed that rule religiously ever since I started to write. Every scene has a purpose, which is stated near the beginning, usually by the third paragraph, and that purpose is either accomplished, or not accomplished by the end of the scene."

Somewhat further on in the same essay, van Vogt says, "To begin with, an author should have an idea for the story itself. At this stage I am not a good example. My early ideas for a story are sometimes so blurred that it seems incredible that the final story developed from such a thin shadow of substance. Let us, accordingly, quickly pass to the stage where the story has taken a vague form. The main character has been named, some tentative writing has been done on odd paragraphs in an effort to establish the 'feel' of the story. Or, possibly the first version of the first scene is written. Since the scene has been written with a scene purpose, it is reasonably clearly focussed, and yet beyond is a great darkness. Where to next? What about the ending? In fact, why worry about the ending at this stage. It's practical, here, to worry about Scene Two."

These two quotations are the key to the plot of *The World of Null-A*. It starts arbitrarily and zig-zags in eight hundred word installments for 180 pages, contradicting itself over and over, making no cumulative sense, and then it stops. It is very busy, full of posturing, declamation and short-range purpose, but somehow very little ever happens on-stage.

As illustration, here is a summary of the plot development from page 51, when Gosseyn I, who has been named and treated as a superman but who doesn't know who he is or what is going on around him, is killed—off-stage—by villains who regard him as a super threat to themselves, though he doesn't know why, and apparently they don't either, to page 115. In other words, the middle third of the book.

Gosseyn is re-born, wearing shorts and sandals, in a forest of giant trees on Venus. He stumbles on a large house and punches up the people who live in it. He is picked up by a roboplane which talks to him, but tells him nothing. It sets him down by a deserted treehouse—that is, a house inside a giant tree. He wanders around in it for several days. He is then captured and brought to Earth by the villains. He plays, "You ask me three questions, I'll ask you three questions" with the President of Earth who is one of the villains, and then is offered the chance to join the gang and be a leader. He is helped to escape by one of the people he punched on Venus, who is then discovered to be a ringer, a baddie. He parachutes back down to the palace of the President of Earth where he is captured again, but then let go on the grounds that if he were killed a third Gosseyn would be born who would be an even greater threat. That's it. That's what happens. Nothing. At the end of those 64 pages Gossyn still doesn't know who he is, why he is important, or what is going on.

From these examinations, we think it can be said without further example that Gilbert Gosseyn is not the Superman that van Vogt and all the other characters treat him as being. But, for whatever light they shed, here are two brief quotations: "In spite of the risk, it did not surprise Gosseyn that they had made progress. There was a curious psychological law that protected men with purposes from those who had none." And—"Gosseyn smiled tolerantly into the night. He was physically and mentally at ease, conscious of his absolute superiority to his environment. 'Prescott,' he said, 'I've been in this jam

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quite a while now. I've been like a bewildered child.' "

So what are we to make of this classic science fiction story in which the philosophical underpinnings make no sense, the plot makes no sense, and the hero makes no sense on any objective level? Something is going on, but what?

From the foregoing, it should be apparent that A. E. van Vogt is a most unusual writer. He is either unwilling or unable to think his way out of a paper bag. His ability to use the English language would bring shame to a college freshman. He is deficient in almost every traditional writing virtue. What is his strength? Recall his avowed working methods. This is a man who works not by sense, but by feel. He makes his stories up as he goes along, and he puts down whatever feels right, whether or not it makes any sense in relation to what he has put down ten pages earlier. This is a writer who is in touch with his subconscious and he follows its dictates blindly. The best he is able to do is to overlay it with sufficient superficial sense to get him through a section of 800 words. What one might optimally hope for is a writer able to combine usefully his conscious and his subconscious, but in speculative fantasy a cooking subconscious by itself is sufficient virtue to have brought a writer like van Vogt to prominence.

The philosophy, the plot and the hero of *The World of Null-A* do make sense, but on subconscious levels at right angles to their objective purport. First, on what we call the level of analogy, the most accessible of the three that we have identified. Analogy falls somewhere in the space between "not hidden, but unrecognizable" and "hidden, but uncoverable". It comes on the "Oh, yes, that's true, isn't it?" level of depth.

In the case of *The World of Null-A*, the analogy that makes sense of what would otherwise be senseless is to three distinct stages of childhood. We would peg them as being about twelve years old, eight, and two, in order of importance.

The least important is the twelve year old. This is where the General Semantics fits in. At this age, words are magical, phrases have power unconnected with their real world meanings. It is not necessary to know what a thing is, but to merely have heard of it when someone else has not to have an unbeatable trump. As an example, I (Alexei, again) can remember an argument I had with the boy next door when I was twelve as to who was the greatest trumpet player in the world. A typical twelve-year-old type of argument. "Louis Armstrong," said I, reporting common wisdom on a subject I knew next to nothing about. "Rafael Mendez," said the boy next door, trumping me easily since I had never heard the name before that moment. And this is exactly how Null-A functions in this novel, as well as in ever so much else. Or, as Prescott says to Gosseyn, " 'If two energies can be attuned on a twenty-decimal approximation of similarity, the greater will bridge the gap of space between them just as if there were no gap, although the juncture is accomplished at finite speeds.' " You would be amazed to learn what that particular phrase stretches to cover.

Next, the eight-year-old stage. This explains the plot. When I was eight, I used to meet two other boys after school every day to play what we called "Guns". This was a running game, an on-going story we made up as we went along, shifting direction the equivalent of every eight hundred words. If one of us was shot dead, it would prove only to be a wound and we would rise again. Everything was, "Yeah, and then . . ." and off we would go in a new direction. Just so with *The World of Null-A*. Is Gosseyn

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stripped limb from limb and left dead? Up he will rise again in the next 800-word section to play on. Is there a bad-guy machine, the Distorter, designed to fuzz the good-guy Games Machine? Watch—"Yeah, and then . . .": Near the end of the book, Gosseyn stumbles upon the Distorter. At random he fiddles with some of its tubes—yes, tubes—and abruptly he finds himself back on Venus again. Or, as the book has it in its complete and total explanation: "Some of the tubes were designed to 'interfere' with the Games Machine, but a few surely could transport him to other parts of the solar system, possibly to key centers of gang activity." Remember, "'You ask three questions, then I'll ask three.'" Remember, "'We have been assigned nine thousand spaceships, forty million men, gigantic munitions factories, yet this is but a fraction of the military power of the greatest empire that ever was. Gosseyn, *we can't lose* . . . Nevertheless, we prefer to play safe. We'd like to invite you, the unknown quantity, to join us as one of the top leaders in the solar system.'" It's all kids playing "Guns" after school, one gang against another gang, and making the whole thing up as they go along.

Finally, the most important stage, the two year old. This explains Gosseyn. Something must, for as one of the chief villains who has been treating him as a super threat throughout the story says very near the end of the book, "'What I don't understand, Gosseyn, is where do *you* fit into this picture?'" There is an answer. Who is it who exists in a complex baffling world that he doesn't understand except for one thing, this world revolves around him? Answer, a two-year-old and Gosseyn. Gosseyn may not know anything else, but he knows that he is important. Remember Gosseyn II waking in sandals and shorts on Venus in a forest of giant trees? He looks up at them, stretching high high above him, and suddenly, *blunk,* a great drop of water falls from a leaf and hits him on the head. This is remembered material. This is early childhood. And no matter how strange the whirling world gets in this novel, Gosseyn remains impervious to all harm in the still center of things. Or, as he says with cool confidence in his own power, "'I've been like a bewildered child.'"

There is material from the two deeper levels of symbol and myth in *The World of Null-A,* too. These levels are not as immediately visible, and because they are multi-ordinate in meaning, not as readily amenable to simple explanation as the level of analogy. Symbol in particular is concealed, being less related to expressed emotion and more related to repressed emotion.

But it is possible to point to at least one unmistakeable area of symbol in *The World of Null-A.* Symbol in speculative fantasy is almost always connected either to aliens or to alien environments. Since there are no aliens in the novel, we must look to the one alien environment, that of Venus, a Venus totally out of van Vogt's imagination. When we do, we find some very strange things going on. Added together, they spell M-O-T-H-E-R. We won't belabor this, but we will quote one passage of the book as evidence.

Remember the house in the giant tree on Venus? After Gosseyn is carried back to Venus by the Distorter, he finds himself inside this tree again. He climbs through a hole onto a limb of the tree, and then we get the following:

"Gosseyn picked out landmarks, and then started along the broad limb onto which he had emerged. About seventy-five yards from the bole it joined an equally massive limb of another tree. He felt a thrill as he saw it. There was a thalamic pleasure in tree running. The

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Venusians must indulge in it often for the sheer animal joy of it. He would remain aloft for about five miles, unless the forest ended first, and then—

"He had proceeded about fifty feet along the limb when the bark under him collapsed. He fell down onto a floor. Instantly, the long trapdoor above him closed, and he was in darkness. Gosseyn scarcely noticed the absence of light. Because, as he hit the smooth floor, *it* tilted downward. Tilted sharply, fifty, sixty, seventy degrees. Gosseyn made one desperate leap upward. His fingers clawed against smooth wood, then slid off into emptiness. He hit the floor again, hard, and slid down that steep incline. It was not a long journey that he took then, not more than thirty feet. But its implications were bottomless. He was caught."

When he lands, what does he find? He finds this: "To his right, he touched a rug. He crawled over the rug and in seconds had fingered a chest of drawers, a table, an easy chair, and a bed. A bedroom! There'd be a light switch, perhaps a table lamp or bed light. His swift thought paused there, yielded to action. The wall switch clicked under his fingers, and so, approximately three minutes after his first fall, he was able to see his prison.

"It was not bad. There were twin beds, but they were in a large alcove of coral pink . . ."

At which point, we rest.

The final level, that of myth, is also represented in *The World of Null-A*. Myth is integrative. It solves the dead ends of analogy and symbol by providing new identifications that allow previously unworkable equations to be solved.

The conclusion of *The World of Null-A* is just such a mythic integration. Gosseyn, the bewildered child, tossed like a shuttlecock back and forth between Earth and Venus by a plot that no one could understand because it has been made up as it goes along, and armed only with the magic words, General Semantics, at last finds an answer. At the Semantic Institute in Korzybski Square, Gosseyn discovers the super-superman who has been behind everything that has happened to him throughout the book. He dies in Gosseyn's arms, passing on his role to Gosseyn. And it is only then, in the last sentence of the book, that Gosseyn realizes who the man is. He rubs off the man's disguising beard with depilatory salve and looks at him: "Here beyond all argument was the visible end-reality of his search. The face was his own."

In other words, what we have, tying together General Semantics, the plot, and Gosseyn, is a reconciliation with the father. One of the basic mythic integrations.

Van Vogt himself, in some recognition of what exists in his book, calls it a fable. He thinks it is unique. He says, "I cannot at the moment recall a novel written prior to *World of Null-A* that had a deeper meaning than that which showed on the surface." He is right in thinking that deeper levels do exist in *The World of Null-A*. They do, even if they are not exactly what he thinks they are. But he is wrong in thinking that *The World of Null-A* is unique. In actual fact, at least one of these three levels of analogy, symbol and myth is centrally present in every sf story. They are, in fact, what speculative fantasy is about. Nothing less.

Our conclusion in this regard parallels that of Cyril Kornbluth in his University of Chicago lecture probing into the underbelly of science fiction. Kornbluth said then, "The science fiction novel does contain social criticism, explicit and implicit, but I believe this criticism is massively outweighed by unconscious symbolic material more concerned with the individual's relationship to his family and the raw universe than with the individual's relationship to society."

(Continued on page 127)

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PORTFOLIO:

JULIAN S. KRUPA

"Master of the Fantastic"

(FANTASTIC ADVENTURES—MAY, 1939)

REVOLT OF THE ROBOTS by Arthur R. Tofte

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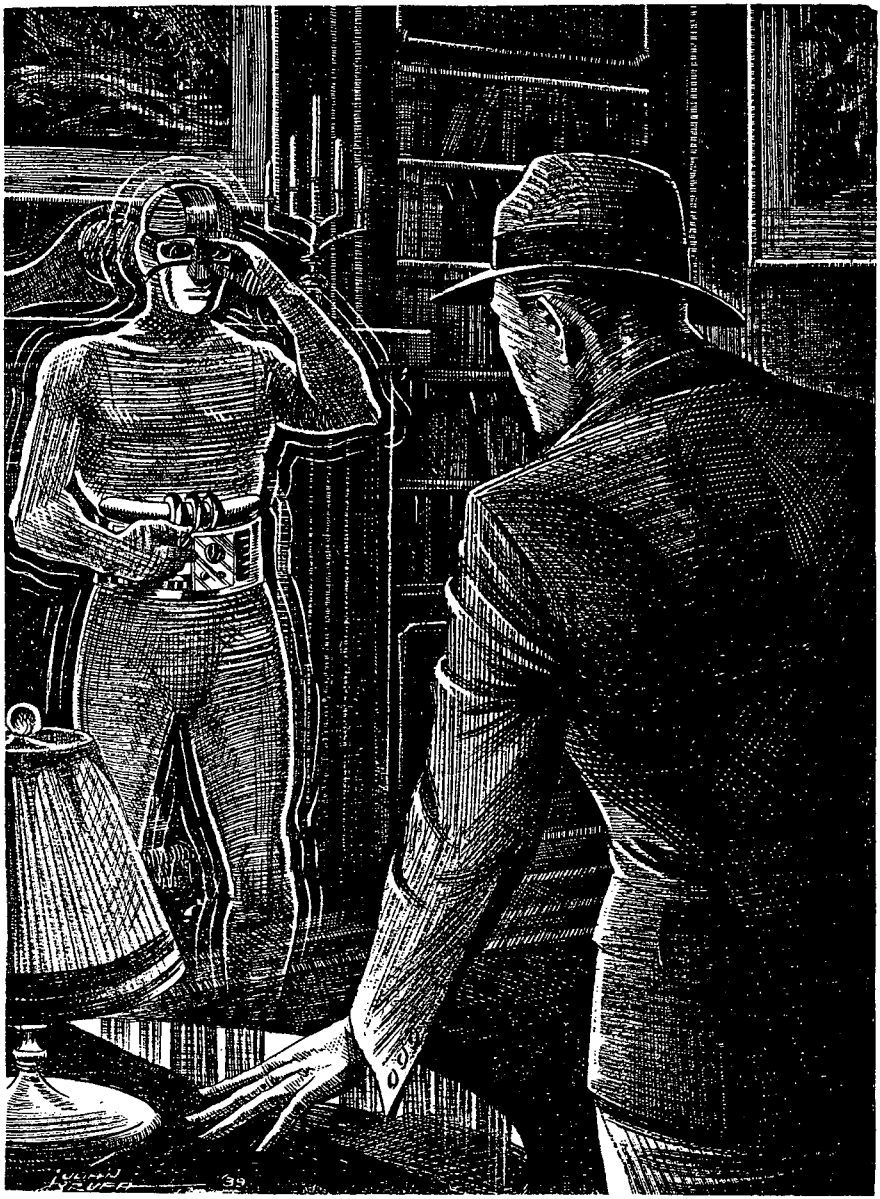

THE INVISIBLE ROBINHOOD by Eando Binder

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Death stalked Darak of Werg at every step, but the Royal Bracelet and the Princess of Werg meant far more than one man's life

THE EMPRESS OF MARS by Ross Rocklynne

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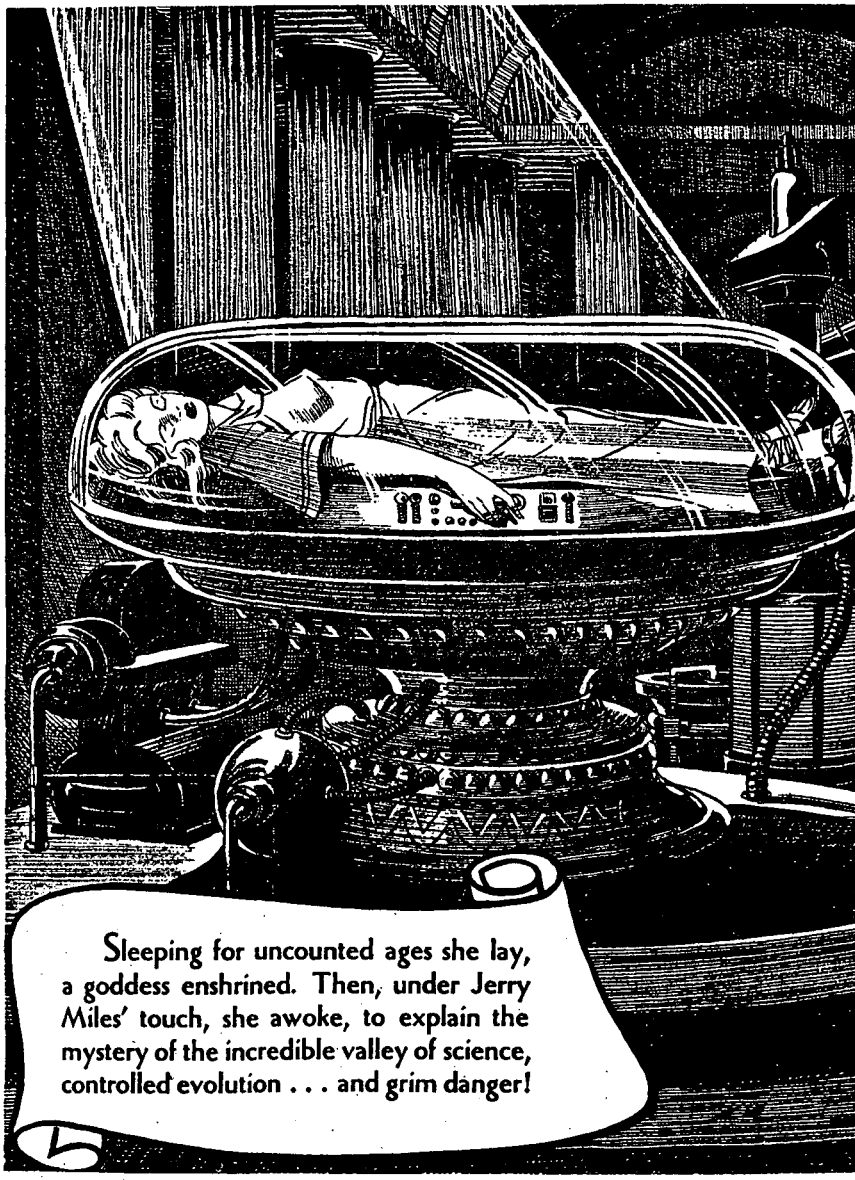
Sleeping for uncounted ages she lay, a goddess enshrined. Then, under Jerry Miles' touch, she awoke, to explain the mystery of the incredible valley of science, controlled evolution . . . and grim danger!

THE SLEEPING GODDESS by Maurice Duclos

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ADVENTURE IN LEMURIA by Frederic Arnold Kummer, Jr.

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THE MUMMY OF RET-SEH by A. Hyatt Verrill

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THE DEVIL FLOWER by Harl Vincent

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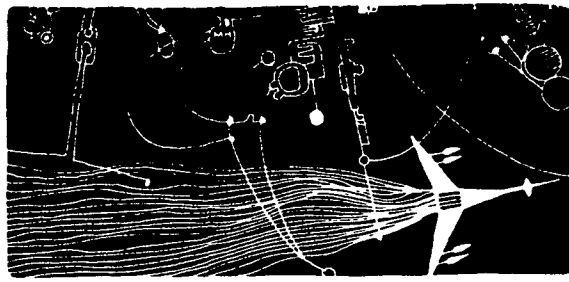
fantasy books



Ursula K. Le Guin: THE TOMBS OF ATUAN. Atheneum, New York, 1971. Hardcover, 163 pp. $5.50

–reviewed by Ted White–

When I reviewed Mrs. Le Guin's *A Wizard of Earthsea* (in the March, 1970, AMAZING STORIES. . .), *I said it was "a* major work of fantasy," and on par with her Nebula and Hugo-winning *The Left Hand of Darkness.* I wish I could say as much for the much-awaited sequel to *Wizard.*

The Tombs of Atuan is less a sequel than a postscript, or, indeed, if further tales of Ged, the Archmage, are to be written, it is an interlude. Two factors are responsible.

The first is length. By my reckoning, this book runs only a little over 40,000 words–short, even for a "juvenile" book, and especially so at $5.50. (*Wizard* was longer, equally handsome, and priced in hardcover at $3.95.) A shorter-yet version was published last year in *Worlds of Fantasy* as "a complete new novel." It omitted the prologue, chapters one, two and part of three, and the final two chapters were condensed into less than a single page. If you've read it you've read the meat of the book's plot, but lack its emotional point and impact, which are contained in those last two chapters.

The book has the *feel* of a novella or novelette: its action centers around a single pivotal point and lacks the interwoven complexity of, for instance, *Wizard.* I was astonished to discover that I had read almost two thirds of the book in a single sitting when I felt myself still to be in the opening third. And those last two chapters, so necessary for the emotional development of the protagonist, still feel anticlimactic, even hurried. They should form a bridge from the introductory section of the book to its main body; instead the "introductory section" *is* the main body.

The second factor is the basic nature of the story. It is, as I have just said, not complete in itself.

The story's protagonist is a girl, Tenar, who is born in the hour in which the One Priestess of the Nameless Ones has died. She is taken as the reincarnation of the One Priestess, Arha, and raised to live her life as Arha.

The religion built up around the Nameless Ones is very old and dying; a Godking has usurped most of the One Priestess's political power and intrigue surrounds her. However little of this is gone into within the body of the story, largely because it turns out to be irrelevant to the plot. I think that's unfortunate.

As the One Priestess, Arha alone is given knowledge of the Tombs of Atuan and the great Labyrinth which honeycombs the earth beneath the halls and temples. Here she learns to spend much of her time in darkness, in the abode of the Nameless Ones. (The Nameless Ones are not a religious fiction; they have their

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own reality.) Much of the main body of the book takes place in these tunnels and passages and this too is a powerfully limiting factor upon the mood and direction of the book.

Into the Labyrinth comes Sparrowhawk, Ged the Archmage-to-be, seeking the half of a powerful talisman, a ring, which has been long lost. He holds its other half. Reunited, the two halves can bring peace to Earthsea. Arha finds him there, imprisons him as a blasphemer (no man who enters the Tombs may ever leave) and ultimately—but, to me, unconvincingly—is won over by him, helping him to find the treasure he seeks and go free. In the penultimate scene, cataclysm takes the undergound Tombs and they collapse in a great earthquake. Ged and Tenar (who has shed her priestess-hood) escape across the mountains to his boat and head for the center of civilization, where the whole Ring will be welcomed by multitudes.

Mrs. Le Guin's prose is rarely less than perfect: clean, almost classically pure in nature. But she has limited herself to a very simple story, in a quite confining setting. She is adept at summoning up rich images with few words, but the darkness of the Labyrinth leaves her relatively little with which to work. It is with a sense of relief that we follow Tenar and Ged out of the darkness and into the spartan loveliness of the desert mountains they cross. And it is here, in the last two chapters of the book, that we find something potentially solid and satisfying to read: the growing development of Tenar's relationship with Ged as she grapples with her own guilt. She has been raised all her life to serve the Nameless Ones whom she now knows to be evil and unworthy of her service. On the one hand lies the guilt of her service—the murders, the sacrifices she ordered—and on the other the guilt of her abandonment of all she was taught to believe. "She cried for the waste of her years in bondage to a useless evil. She wept in pain, because she was free."

This, then, is the starting point of her growth into maturity. It is also where the book ends. Disappointingly so, for me, because all that has gone before—her service as the One Priestess, her renunciation of that serivce—has been only an appetizer before the main course.

It would be pleasant to regard *Tombs* as but a precursor to a longer work, one in which perhaps Tenar will find herself and grow to adulthood (in the company, as is hinted, of old Ogion, Ged's first master), or Ged himself will face his greatest challenges as he becomes Archmage. But until those books are written, we must content ourselves with what is here, in this slim volume.

And it disappoints me. Ged is a shadowy figure, viewed too often without comprehension by Tenar, who is herself too unformed to sustain a complete book. The richness of *Wizard* is here only by reflection: the hints of lands and peoples which have slipped through the cracks in Ged's conversations. The turning point at which Tenar rejects her life as Arha comes too easily and did not convince me—and the difficulty with which she lives up to her decision (in which at last she begins to define herself) comes too late to wholly mitigate the ease with which she rejected the whole of her training and life. (There are hints that perhaps Ged used his magic to help her over the hurdle of the decision, but these are not convincing.)

From a lesser writer I would expect no more. From the author of *A Wizard of Earthsea* I expected much more.

—Ted White

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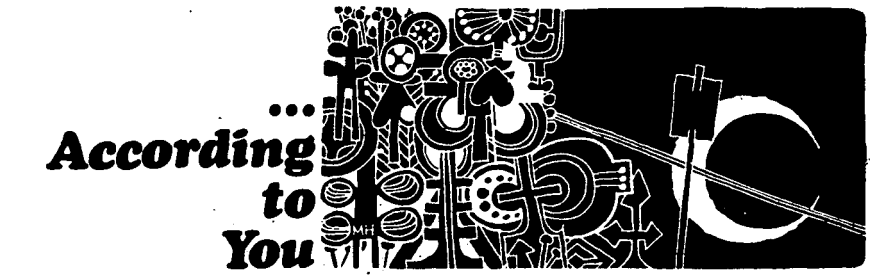

Letters intended for publication should be typed, double-spaced, on one side of each sheet of paper, and addressed to: According To You, *P.O. Box 409, Falls Church, Va., 21046.*

Dear Ted,

I have been receiving phone calls and letters from friends asking me if I am the "... local fan whose work was embarrassing." I've been replying, "I hope not!"

I'm referring to your October editorial where you listed the Guilford attendees by name, except for the "local fan." You were kind not to mention his name, but I'm afraid it made the sentence ambiguous. For the record, I am not that fan.

Enough complaining. I was especially impressed with Alexei Panshin's article. Looking forward to the Guilford Issue.

Jack M. Dann
222 Ackley Avenue
Johnson City, N.Y., 13790

That's what comes of working against deadlines. The ambiguity of the line in question ("... , Jack Dann, a local fan whose work was embarrassing, and myself,") didn't occur to me until I received your letter. My apologies.—TW

Dear Ted,

An *excellent* Adkins cover on the June FANTASTIC, also well-designed and reproduced. Possibly one of the best covers since that superb blue/green Jones back last year. And again, good not merely for the art used, but also because it grabs the eye on the newsstand—and that, after all is said and done, has to be the basic purpose of a consumer magazine cover.

I commented on Bill Graham's illustration for a story back in one of the AMAZINGS in my last letter. Now I come upon another of that gentleman's illustrations, here on page 59. Even considering the story it illustrates, this is a mediocre, at best, piece of work; it isn't even especially well drawn, and appears very comic oriented. Believe me, I think we'd all *much* rather see Jones, Hinge, even Kaluta than this individual.

On the other hand, the Steve Harper illo on 67 (I'm not familiar with him, either) is quite nice, especially for a relative (to me, at least) unknown. Striking, well done.

Well. Mr. deCamp's piece on Howard is entertaining, yes, as is all of his writing. But is yet another bit on Conan and his creator really necessary? As a matter of fact, is the whole section really necessary? I'd much rather see fiction from Mr. deCamp, or even criticism of current fantasy, than this rehash of biographical information. I think I'd even rather see more pure fantasy from other writers than this; I'd certainly rather see a more frequent book review column, by Mr. Leiber if possible, by Leiber and others if necessary. But I confess to finding this column about fantasy writers quite uninteresting, at least so far.

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Nothing to quibble with Alexei this time—just a note to register my continued admiration for his work in discussing and analyzing the field. I certainly hope some enterprising publisher packages these collected columns sometime in the near future.

As I told you at Lunacon, the August cover is quite interesting; not all that good—and certainly far from modern—but also different, and nice in its own way. On the other hand, Mike Hinge's two ¼-page illos for *The Byworlder* are *really* pretty bad, and I think you've got to admit that. Mike's had some excellent work in your pages, but these two quick sketches rank with the worst I've seen in a prozine since, I guess, *Witchcraft and Sorcery.*

Interesting to note that the latest *Green Lantern* (a DC comic) has, for the medium, an exceptionally advanced drug story, one which culminates with the revelation that Speedy, good old WASP sidekick for Green Arrow, is on heroin. Certainly better than most of the drug fiction I've seen in the mass media, and I really do look forward to the conclusion of that episode. As a matter of interest, I haven't seen any copies of *Blackmark,* anywhere.

Talking about coverless copies—I saw coverless copies of a particular issue of *Worlds of Tomorrow* (actually not, coverless, but with the title section of the cover missing) on sale in Philadelphia during Philcon at least a month before I was able to find "normal" copies, in New York City.

It's silly to quibble over favorite writers, but there is such a thing as a certain level of quality and competence. As Panshin has pointed out many times in his columns here in FANTASTIC, the differences between "fantasy" and "science fiction" are minimal at best. Whether they specifically write "fantasy" or "science fiction", there is little question that Lafferty, Russ, Panshin, Delany and Zelazny are far better writers on any level than Lin Carter, Gardner Fox, and John Norman. Does Mr. Justice suggest you pursue obviously inferior writers, simply because they specialize in one particular subgenre of the whole field? He further mentions L. Sprague deCamp as one of those authors responsible for "the most exciting writing in fantasy these days." Unless I'm badly mistaken, deCamp has written (or published, at least) only *The Goblin Tower* in the last dozen or so years. And even Dean would admit that "The Crimson Witch" is very minor at best; a story written and sold quickly, to a formula market. Certainly we can't ask that *just* the types of fiction Compton or I prefer should be published here, especially if the magazine is to hope to survive. But we should consider certain levels of competence, even while trying to satisfy fans of certain types of writing. I'm sure you believe this, Ted—which is why the fiction, especially the novels, in *Fantastic* has been far superior to the S&S crud you certainly could have obtained.

Jerry Lapidus
54 Clearview Drive
Pittsford, N.Y. 14534

I've cobbled your two letters into one, Jerry, and cut the redundancies; thus your belated comments on both the June and August issues here. And, because I didn't answer your question about Bill Graham in AMAZING, *I'll do so here. I first saw his work in one of the quasi-underground tabloids in New York, and later in the Warren magazines*—Creepy, *et al—of which he is now an editor. We met one evening at Jeff Jones' apartment and Bill told me he wanted to illustrate for my magazines. I gave him the two assignments you saw, and while I was by no means as unhappy with the results as you seem to have been, they weren't up to my expec-*

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tations, either. But I know Bill can do better work—I've seen much better work by him elsewhere—and you'll find him in this issue again, hopefully with an illustration more to your liking. Steve Harper made his debut in these pages with his illustration for Ursula K. LeGuin's "The Good Trip," back in our August, 1970, issue, and has appeared on and off ever since (with a break during a European jaunt). He did the cover for our February, 1971, issue—one you may remember as particularly striking. As for Sprague's column, it has been quite popular with most of our readers, and will continue, on an irregular basis, for as long as he wishes. I think the fact that we made the mistake of compressing the opening installment may have put you off; I find it a fascinating counterpoint to SF in Dimension, *myself. I must also disagree with your assessment of Mike Hinge's illustrations in the August issue, but I'll agree that having to work in such a cramped format, and with an impossibly short deadline, didn't help matters at all. I'm not going to argue the relative merits of the various authors you named, but I suspect that in saying deCamp hasn't written any new fantasy fiction you're overlooking his Conan collaborations with Lin Carter. (I might add that I consider Lin a grossly underrated writer—but since Lin has contributed more than anyone to the image of himself as a "hack" writer, I guess it's a problem he has no trouble living with.) But you've put your finger on a point I hope the stories in this issue underline: fantasy takes in a broad spectrum of writing, and one we try to mirror in* FANTASTIC. *I'm always receptive to sword-and-sorcery stories, but I do demand they strive for a higher level than most of those I've seen of late. Good story-telling and good prose are as essential in a swashbuckling adventure story as anywhere else. I don't think the fans of sword-and-sorcery fiction are going to put up much longer with the low standards presently prevailing, especially among paperback originals. —TW*

Dear. Mr. White,

Despite the claims of many of its advocates, the Original Anthology is in no position to replace the SF magazine as the new form of introducing new short fiction to the field. This can be seen in that at this year's Nebula Awards Banquet, none of the awards went to stories that had made their first appearances in an original anthology, for the first time in five years. The main reasons that the anthologies such as *Orbit* and *Quark/* can't replace the magazines is that the magazines can present more, due to their more timely nature, in the way of informative non-fiction to their readers. And undeniably one of the most important and widely-read features in any magazine is the book reviews.

With almost 200 new SF novels being published in the US each year, plus the large number of reprints, collections, anthologies, no fan has any hope of reading them all. To keep himself informed as to what is promising in the publishing field, one reads the book reviews, which appear in ever SF magazine published in the country. As a result of this, the book columns are extremely influential upon their readers, and have a profound effect upon the sales of the books reviewed in them. Whether a book will sell or not, whether it will win an award for its year, whether a paperback house will pick it up for reprinting or foreign publication, all depends heavily on what critical reception it gets. The book columns, then, which are almost exclusively written by four people—James Blish, Algis Budrys, Lester Del Rey, and P. Schuyler Miller—have a powerful effect upon the entire SF field.

Such power should not come without

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its responsibilities. Influence such as this could be abused. My feelings are: that books that the critics feel should be brought to the attention of his readers—those by major writers, or by new names in the field that might not get the attention they deserve otherwise—should be reviewed; they should be reviewed on the basis of their qualities alone, without any regard to the critic or his editors relations with the book's author; and that the reviews should be printed by the magazine publishers in the earliest issue possible.

Now these aren't exactly radical suggestions I'm making; in fact, I doubt that any of the critics in the field or their editors would disagree with me on those points. But if SF criticism is as objective as it's supposed to be, then why:

In *Worlds of Fantasy* #3, Lester Del Rey reviewed *A Wizard of Earthsea,* giving it a good review and stating that it had to have a sequel. In the same issue, strangely enough, was Ursula LeGuin's *The Tombs of Atuan,* a sequel to *A Wizard of Earthsea.*

That's not so strange in itself, but only a few months later, in *If* #154, Del Rey reviewed Philip Jose Farmer's Riverworld novel, *To Your Scattered Bodies Go,* assuring his readers that this was one book they had to have. Coincidentally, in that very same issue was the beginning of Farmer's *new* Riverworld novel, *The Fabulous Riverboat.*

Now, something like this happening once may very well be a simple coincidence, but twice in six months, by the same critic, and it becomes a little suspicious. The reader doesn't know whether this is the doing of Del Rey, who wrote the reviews, or Ejler Jakobsson, who decided what issues to put them in, or both; but it becomes apparent to the reader that something rather unethical is going on, and everything that Del Rey has done comes under suspicion. He gave Niven's *Ringworld* a rave review, saying it was the best candidate for the Nebula and Hugo that he had seen in 1970, and the reader wonders whether he praised it so lavishly because it was a good book, or because most of Niven's short fiction has been published in *If.* Maybe he wrote that review with the purest motives in the world, but once he has established himself as being involved in the professional back-scratching described above, you can't really trust anything he's said.

Maybe Del Rey had nothing to do with it. Possibly he wrote those reviews on his own accord, and Jakobsson juggled them about so that they came out in the same issues as the related stories. But the reader has no way of knowing. I wrote Jakobsson, asking for an explanation. He never answered.

But this sort of thing isn't really too surprising, once you think about it. No editor is going to like one of his reviewers lambasting a novel by a writer who writes regularly for that magazine, or has just sold a novel to them. An editor would be even less likely to want to print a bad review of a novel that was first published *in one of his magazines.* (Or hasn't anybody wondered why such a widely anticipated novel as *I Will Fear No Evil* has not been reviewed in either *Galaxy* or *If?*)

This sort of critical inanity is by no means restricted to Jakobsson and/or Del Rey, however. P. Schuyler Miller does a lot of it himself. In a recent review of *I will Fear No Evil,* which he didn't like, he stated that he didn't know whether John Campbell had seen the novel, but if he had, he had done well in rejecting it. Making a ridiculous statement like *that,* and basing it on a totally hypothetical reason which he could have checked out easily if he had wanted to, makes me seriously wonder about the mental proc-

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esses of the critic. If he consistently made licentious remarks like that, he wouldn't be any problem; everyone would simply ignore him. But he isn't all that stupid, at least not all the time. Both he and Del Rey more than occasionally make some astute observations or really worthwhile comments, despite the shenanigans they may also be engaging in, and it's a shame that they can't write like intelligent reviewers all the time, without resorting to underhandedness or nonsense.

But what goes on deliberately in the book columns isn't all of it: simple carelessness and inaccuracy is one of the worst and most common banes of responsible criticism. Barry Malzberg, for instance, has written for a book column only once, to my knowledge; yet in that column, which ran less than 3500 words, he made (by my count) 10 errors; including mistakes in prices, synopses, dates, putting Ursula LeGuin's name on a list that she didn't belong on, and misquoting another writer. The reviews ran in *F&SF* for May, 1970, and four months later James Blish, in his regular column, contradicted Malzberg on one of his more major errors. Such unforgiveable carelessness wouldn't be nearly so bad if it weren't for the fact that Malzberg, like Miller and Del Rey, wasn't such a good critic when he knows what he doing. In his recent article on Dianetics in AMAZING, he made more errors, which were pointed out in later letter columns. The really tragic thing about it is that such sloppiness could be averted by nothing more than a little research and more careful reading.

And last, but possibly most important, is the matter of rebuttals. To my knowledge, other than A & F, *F&SF* is the only magazine that has provisions for printing the grievances of authors who felt that they have been treated unfairly in the Bookcols. Apparently the other magazines either think that their critics are too omnipotent to make mistakes or just don't want to make mistakes by printing some author's contradictions. In either case, such suppression of dissent is only one more step away from obtaining some open-minded, two-sided out-in-the-open criticism. I think a little constructive dissent is just what the field needs.

So those are my gripes about SF criticism today. If it can be worked into a reliable responsible form of literary analysis, rather than the sloppy, shallow, back-room kind of vivisection we see all too often, then maybe it will gain the critical acceptance that it deserves.

Greg Feeley
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Fremont, Calif. 94538

There is one basic flaw in your assumptions, Greg, and it's compounded by your ignorance of the actual publishing circumstances which surround columns such as Lester del Rey's. The flaw is to be found in your statement that "the book columns are extremely influential upon their readers, and have a profound effect upon the sales of the books reviewed in them." This just isn't true, and all things considered, perhaps that's just as well. Only a tiny fraction of the sf books published are reviewed in the magazines, and the reason is one of practicability. Until it folded, Science Fiction Review *attempted to keep up with as many books as possible, reviewing scores in each issue—and by no means covered them all. It would require every page in this magazine to do the job, and even then I doubt every book would be done justice. But, despite this lack of adequate reviews, some sf books have sold overwhelmingly well. And, at the same time, some books which earn rave reviews throughout the field, and go on to win every award in sight, sell no better than average, if that. (Ursula K. LeGuin's* Left Hand of Darkness *is a case in point; I'm told its sales were "disappointing".) The reviews*

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in the sf magazines may call overlooked books to some readers' attention, but they lack the power to either make or break a book in terms of sales. As for Lester del Rey's two reviews in question, I believe their publication in the context you remark upon is coincidental. I have known Lester del Rey for some years and I have the highest respect for his integrity as a person and as a critic. He is simply not the sort of man to plug specific authors' books because they had material appearing in the same magazines as his reviews; his mind doesn't work that way. And, I might add, he is far from alone in his assessment of the works in question. (For my *opinion of the sequel to* A Wizard of Earthsea, *see* Fantasy Books *this issue.) Perhaps you are unaware that P. Schuyler Miller lives in Pittsburgh, and isn't (or, wasn't) a local phone call away from John Campbell. All of us make rash statements upon occasion; I'd suggest you take our human fallibility into account and forgive us our (critical) trespasses when they annoy you. (For further comments on this subject, see the editorial, this issue.) —TW*

Dear Mr. White,

Comments on FANTASTIC for October 71:

Your editorial is interesting, but I think you might have directed more thought towards people's reactions towards the vaguely defined oncoming disaster. The naively ignorant talk of "alarmists" and many of the more self-centered refuse to believe that Amerika could starve, and of course the rest of the world doesn't really matter. (Perhaps these people would be interested by a remark Dr. Ehrlich made once: "For some reason starving people don't usually have the money to buy food and other commodities that we sell," or words to that effect. Imagine the effects of such a thing on our sacred economy! With the entire world market cut off the stock market would shit a brick then curl up and die and take with it our still surviving 19th century capitalism.)

Of course the only possible way out of world famine etc. would be for the major countries of the world, most notably the USSR and ourselves to give up their own colonial interests (the Middle East & SE Asia for example) and devote themselves to trimming the world's population in a civilised and peaceful manner, and helping the rest of it limp along. Of course this provides no immediate profit for anyone, so with the mentalities present in the governments of both countries right now, it is out of the question. Nature will be left to take its course.

One slight remedy for world famine is available to us right now, and it's growing in everyone's back yard: the marvelous plant known as the dandelion. This thing can be eaten raw as a substitute for lettuce and cabbage, you can make wine out of it, and I'm sure there are other uses (you mention using the heads). It can grow anywhere under the roughest conditions, it spreads rapidly with no seeding required, and produces God only knows how many crops a year. Has it ever occurred to anyone to *farm dandelions?* Any gardener knows how hardy and prolific these things are, but I wonder how many people have ever thought of eating the damn things? Let's be conservative and say they could produce twenty crops a year, with a temperate zone type growing season, and their yield per acre is quite high. They require almost no work at all to grow, and undoubtedly could be a cheap and easy remedy that would make the various "miracle grains" look like nothing at all.

Other things: I am in complete agreement with Cy Chauvin concerning reprints in AMAZING and FANTASTIC. There is absolutely no excuse why these things

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can't be real classics, or at least moderately well known stories. Especially now when you are limited to one reprint per issue. All Katz has to do is come up with twelve worthwhile stories in a single year. Surely not a hard task. There were times in the past when AMAZING was a first rate magazine, most notably during the Gernsback and Sloane eras (I am not counting Cele Goldsmith's editorship because it was too recent), and the mag didn't really become bad until Ray Palmer took over, so there are an awful lot of good or reasonably good issues lying around. As for FANTASTIC ADVENTURES, you might have a slight problem, because that magazine was mostly edited by Palmer and Browne didn't improve it much (but it really had no place to go but up after Palmer), so I might recommend reprints from the very early digest issues of FANTASTIC. Also, I see no reason why you can't make additional reprints from other magazines, as long as the copyrights on them have run out. There was during Joe Ross's editorship a reprint from *Weird Tales* ("People of The Black Circle" by Robert E. Howard, Jan. 67) so I see no reason why you can't reprint more from *WT,* or *Strange Tales,* or even the Munsey magazines. You only have about fifteen or twenty pages to fill per issue—you should be able to come up with something better than what you have been.

Sprague deCamp's series is shaping up nicely, and I hope he will go on to write about fantasy writers about whom very little has been written, such as Lord Dunsany, J. R. R. Tolkein (I know he is very famous and all, but I have yet to see an article about him in the manner of Sprague's Lovecraft article this issue), and perhaps Arthur Machen. Oh yes, also Mervyn Peake. There were a few pieces on him in *New Worlds* just before that magazine dropped out of the SF/fantasy field, but they were skimpy at best.

Sprague handles the old question of HPL's sexlife quickly and tastefully without any real crackpot armchair psychiatry, but I think we all should keep in mind that a great deal of HPL's attitudes and actions would be formed by the repressive society in which he lived, and since his mother and aunts seemed to be a very old-fashioned lot, HPL would tend to be more "Victorian" than the average person of his day.

Very fine issue this month, but I wish you would refrain from listing your entire contents on the front cover. At least the notice of the Littenberg story could have been dropped, because this guy is hardly anyone's idea of a big name author, and his name probably didn't sell a single extra copy. There is no point in listing unknowns on the cover, especially writers making their debut, as is the case with David Anthony Kraft in the Sept. AMAZING. Absolutely no one outside the few hundred people who read the right fanzines will know who he is, and that might have even scared a couple off because Dave's amateur fiction has in general been anything but impressive. ("Myrra" does show some promise though.)

Darrel Schweitzer
113 Deepdale Rd.
Strafford, Pa. 19087

I've eaten dandelion in just about every form and fashion possible, and I doubt very much it would make a satisfactory staple crop. Greens must be picked early, before the plant flowers, or they will be impossibly bitter. To be used in salads they must be very *young—one bitter leaf can make an entire salad inedible, as I've learned from, ahh, bitter experience. The buds (not heads; dandelion doesn't produce a head, in the sense iceberg lettuce or cabbage does) require hours of picking for one serving—the flower buds must be picked from the crown of the plant before rising*

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on their stalks, and like cooked greens, lose most of their nutrients in the cooking (particularly if bitter enough to require cooking in two waters). One worthwhile use for the plant (and for its first cousin, the wild chicory) is the root, however. Both plants have large taproots (on plants several years old, this root can be more than a foot long and as big around as your wrist) which, when cleaned, slow-roasted in an oven (until black and brittle clear through), and ground into powder, make an excellent coffee-substitute. The uses of the dandelion are peripheral to the needs of a starving nation, however, It supplies none of the proteins found in grains or beans, and few of the essential vitamins. For that reason I doubt the humble, though prolific, dandelion will ever replace those "miracle grains." As for the reprints, you'll be pleased to notice that they are absent this issue, and—hopefully—they won't be back. It will take us a little while to adjust to their absense in fitting together each issue, as you may notice, but we expect to get the hang of it. Finally, you wanted deCamp on Dunsany? Here it is! —TW

Dear Ted White,

Please publish this letter. It is *important* enough. Cy Chauvin mentioned the items discussed in my letter, but just barely, and omitted the vital points. Since no typewriter is available to me at this writing, you or your designate can do the typing. I'm sure you agree the letter is important enough to fandom and science fiction to see print.

Dear Fandom,

How dare you charge $4.00 for the privilege of nominating and voting in the Hugo awards. I was unaware that votes could be bought.

It may interest you to know that a poor slob just might have better judgment in selecting a Hugo winner than a wealthier one. Of course, this is not always the case but it just could be in certain instances.

I would assume that a statistical breakdown would indicate the same level of judgment among poor and rich fandom. However, it is completely undesirable that a person should be denied the right to nominate and vote for Hugo contenders solely because he is not as financially well padded as others. Furthermore, to be *objective,* the Hugos should be awarded by the *largest* possible vote and the $4.00 fee would negate this necessity. I realize that the cost of the Hugos must be paid for in some way but please, not at the expense of objectivity in selecting the winners. The important thing is designating the best stories. The award is secondary. Better a tinplated space ship for a *real* winner than a golden trophy for an inferior work.

Daniel Tanenbaum
Hotel Elk
360 W. 42nd St.
New York, N.Y., 10036

I think you've confused matters a bit. The Hugos are awarded yearly by the World Science Fiction Convention, and have been since 1953. In earliest years the nominating was done by the convention committee; until the late fifties the nominating and voting was done on a single, open ballot. When nominations assumed a separate role, the only requirement to nominate was usually membership in the present or previous year's convention—and sometimes this was waived (at the option of the current convention committee) to allow totally open nominations (one year the nominating ballots were published in all the major professional sf magazines, for example). However, traditionally the final voting was limited to those members of the convention at which the awards were to be given. The cost of membership was originally quite low—usually a dollar for a "supporting" (non-attending) membership and two or

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three dollars for a full, "attending" membership. Either type of membership allowed one to vote.

However, as attendance at the conventions has spiralled upward in recent years, so also has the membership fee. The fee charged for the 1971 convention in Boston was, by all standards, outrageous—and that for the coming convention in Los Angeles is no less so. This fee has little or nothing to do with the cost of the Hugo trophies—and, indeed, seems related primarily to the egos of the convention eommitteemen and their urge to handle ever-larger sums of money (tens of thousands of dollars, now).

A new breed of fan is emerging: one whose interest in fandom lies largely in the degree to which he can realise a monitary profit from his fannish endeavors. My contempt for this kind of fan is profound. I am convinced that if he is allowed to do so he will wreck fandom as surely as speculators have wrecked the other fandoms and hobby-groups like coin-collecting, comics fandom, etc. The name of the game is greed. However, I see little that fans can do to combat such activities, short of boycotts, and the annual World SF Convention is itself so much a traditional part of sf fandom that I doubt any boycott could be more than half-hearted and ineffective.

As recently as ten years ago, a student fan short of funds could attend a World SF convention on $25.00 to $50.00 and enjoy himself. Today he requires no less than $100.00 and twice that sum if he is to get by comfortably. A family must budget $300.00 to $500.00, and a thousand dollars is a not unlikely requirement for a few years hence. This is a result not only of the attendance fees charged ($10.00 and up) but the hotels chosen. Because larger conventions require larger convention facilities, the choice of available hotels is narrowed considerably, and rooms which went for $10.00 a day only five years ago will now cost the luckless attendee $20.00 a day and up.

I see little awareness on the part of the convention committeemen of the extent to which their selection of hotels has pushed this upward spiral of expenses to ever greater heights, but surely it cannot go on indefinitely. This is a period of economic recession, and more than 50% of all sf fans are students—highschool and college—who have felt the nip of the recession earlier and harder than most. This is the actual context of the Hugo voting costs, and it's a bit more complex than I think you were aware. —TW

Dear Mr. White,

Just a quick(?) letter to remark on how much I've enjoyed the upgrade process that FANTASTIC STORIES has undergone during your time as editor. Strangely, I only bought the magazine as the whim moved me, until I happened to note in a Lancer book *(Brak the Barbarian)* that John Jake's works had first appeared here. And wonder of wonders, there was Poul Anderson, Ted White, L. Sprague de Camp, et cetera, et cetera . . . !

As you may have guessed by now, I keep an eye out for the Fantasy portion of the magazine, rather than the S-F half. In that respect, I must echo Douglas W. Justice's letter in your August issue.

I paid particular attention to your August editorial, which was well written, but I must complain of one detail left out: you didn't say one single word about what length of stories you wanted, rates of payment, so on and so forth. Take it from there!

This in itself is important I feel, if you want we budding(?) fantasy writers, who are your potential Robert Howards, John Jakes, de Camps, and other members (potentially) of the Brotherhood of the Sword to give you first crack at our at-

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tempts to add to Fantasy. In my particular case, I have two such manuscripts, one nearly completed and one in first rough-cut, but don't know how long you want them, and I begin to repeat my earlier statements.

To end this letter, Mr. Justice commented on first making the acquaintance of FANTASTIC STORIES in Long Binh, Vietnam. You'll be glad to know that our BXs' here carry it in copious numbers. In fact, the June and August issues both appeared within two weeks of each other! Ted, you fantasy writers are going to have to have a long talk with your personal sorcerers . . .

SSgt. Douglas K. Howard
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My August editorial was intended less as a market report to prospective authors than a behind-the-scenes glimpse of how the magazine is put together. As far as the length of stories I'm looking for these days, my preference is stories of 5,000 words or less, since these are the stories we use the most of. Our rates run from 1¢ a word to 3¢ a word (and, for a favored few, yet higher); newcomers start at the bottom rung of the ladder and work up. —TW

That concludes our letters this issue. Next issue a special treat: the first half of Gordon Eklund's new 70,000 word novel, "Beyond The Resurrection." It was two years ago, as of our next issue, in April, 1970 FANTASTIC, that we published Gordon's first story, "Dear Aunt Annie." In introducing it I said, "It is my opinion that Eklund will be as well known and as important within our field five years from now as, for instance, Roger Zelazny was five years after he first appeared in these pages."

Since then, "Dear Aunt Annie" has gone on to be a Nebula runner-up and has appeared in the Ace *World's Best Science Fiction.* Eklund has published a series of memorable stories, both here and in magazines like *F&SF, Galaxy,* etc., as well as in *Quark/1, Universe 1,* et al, and his first novel, *The Eclipse of Dawn,* was an Ace Science Fiction Special (he has a second novel also coming out from Ace; it was to be a Special before that line was discontinued).

"Beyond The Resurrection" is his third novel, and by all accounts his best. It is my prediction that it will be ranked, in the years to come, with Sturgeon's *More Than Human.* Its publication in our April, 1972 issue will mark the second anniversary of Eklund's debut, here, and should go a long way in fulfilling my forecast of two years ago.

Remember the title: "Beyond The Resurrection;" you'll be voting it a Hugo in 1973. —Ted White

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(Continued from page 86)

"The Professor!" I whispered, and Paul nodded.

And that, of course, was the end of the adventure. After such an experience, we were both very well content to accept the objective reality of the physical world, with all the limitations it imposed on us.

"WHAT DID MRS. BOWEN make of it all afterwards?" I asked.

"She didn't mention it," said Mrs. Tokkin, "and I never had the courage to raise the question."

—WILMAR H. SHIRAS

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ALL IN COLOR FOR A DIME

Edited by
DICK LUPOFF & DON THOMPSON

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(Continued from page 4)

Book reviews in this period were usually brief and rarely critical. The books themselves were already enhanced with good reputations dating from their original magazine appearances and little more was needed than to call new readers' attention to their existence.

Damon Knight was the first sf critic to make a name for himself as a critic, and he did so with a late-forties fanzine article in which he took apart, analyzed, and ultimately condemned, van Vogt's *World of Null-A,* dealing with the original magazine serial.

His tools were a logical mind, common sense, and some awareness of those areas of literature which lay beyond our cloistered gardens. (But Knight was three or four decades behind the times when, in the late fifties, he discovered Freudian criticism, a critical dead-end already buried and forgotten by the mainstream critics in the twenties.) His impact—especially on van Vogt, who apparently still to this day smarts from the memory of that review—was overwhelming. Science fiction fans had formed their enthusiasms all but inarticulatedly; they raved over their favorites and scorned the hacks, but rarely did they apply critical tools to the defense of their positions. At that time van Vogt was riding the crest of his popularity, and it had rather less to do with his skills as a writer than the sheer spell-bindingness of his story-construction. He razzled and he dazzled and the hand proved faster than most eyes; until Knight wrote his critical piece (still in print in his collection of criticism from Advent, *In Search of Wonder*) few readers asked such basic questions as, "Does this make any sense?"

Well, in fact very little van Vogt makes much sense, looked at logically. Spell-binders rarely do. But van Vogt was probably the greatest spell-binder the sf world has ever seen, and it is entirely to his credit that his spells hadn't been shattered much earlier.

In 1950, Knight edited a nearly forgotten magazine, *Worlds Beyond,* which lasted but three issues and contained within its unattractive pages not only some of the very best stories of the period but also Knight's first professionally published criticism. It was a shot in the dark. Those who read the reviews were impressed, but the audience was small.

A year or so later, *Astounding,* which had been running an occasional book review, usually as fillers, inaugurated P. Schuyler Miller's *Reference Library* column. Miller has never made any bones about what he does: he writes reviews, not criticism. He brings the knowledge and enthusiasm of many decades to bear and states his likes and dislikes simply. Few authors will learn about their mistakes from him, but he isn't writing for the authors of the books he reviews; he is writing for his magazine's audience, and, it would appear, he is better tuned to their likes and dislikes than almost anyone else one might think of. Miller has the virtue of consistency. He tells you, 'these are my credentials: read me a few issues and you'll know what I do and don't like;' from this the average reader can form his own opinion of how to respond to Miller's reviews.

Miller is, by virtue of longevity, without a doubt the dean of sf magazine book reviewers. He is now entering his third decade at it.

Knight, in turn, made sporadic appearances in various short-lived sf magazines of the fifties, and has virtually retired from the game. What remains is the collected volume from Advent of his criticism and essays, mixed in quality but always lively reading and a good over-all review of the field as well. He has, in the last ten years, more than once turned

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down offers from such magazines as *F&SF* to do a critical column.

It's easy to understand why. Reviewing is somewhat numbing, but not impossible—as Miller has proven—to continue doing year in and year out. Thoughtful criticism is another story. One enters the arena full of good resolutions, brimming with insights to be shared, and certain of one's superior capabilities. But, as one brings one's critical sights to bear on book after book one finds the joy wearing thin, the insights worn through repetition, and one's patience failing.

Sturgeon's law states it very well: for every good sf book published there are nine more which run the gamut from time-wasters to unreadability. At first the urge is predatory: a bad book offers priceless opportunities to display one's skill at the kill. A good review of a bad book should be a lesson in the basic craft of writing; each mistake the author made is an obvious example to be avoided. Some of the very best (and most worthwhile) works of sf criticism have used as their objects books nearly wholly beyond redemption. (James Blish, at his peak as a critic in the mid-fifties, was probably responsible for the best criticial essays on the worst science fiction then extant.)

But once one has done a proper job on a thoroughly worthless book (by which I mean a review which has not contented itself with slashing the author to ribbons—those are the lazy way out and a dime a dozen—but one which has in the process of taking the book apart shown precisely how it was wrongly constructed and given us an object lesson in how books *should* be written)—one feels little urge to repeat the task for a second time, much less a third, fourth or fifth.

And yet, there are all those bad books (nine to every good one) waiting to be read and reviewed. It is entirely too easy to fall into bad habits (as even Knight did upon occasion, notably in a review of a Jerry Sohl travesty), using the book at hand as an object of derision, playing it up for the audience's yuks of uncomprehending laughter. It is too easy to lose one's patience and become vicious. I suspect this was the determining factor in Knight's decision to give it all up.

Today of course, the volume of sf books being published is far greater—and it is possible to avoid a good many of the absolute dogs without running short of books to review. But the principle still holds: criticism of real solidarity demands of one a commitment which is impossible to maintain over the long haul. Each work of solid, lasting criticism leaves one with just that much less to say next time, until at last one has said it all—all that one has in him to be said, at any rate—and nothing is left but empty words, often facile, but only goings-through-the-motions and nothing more. Two of the critics Greg Feeley mentions in his letter have certainly come to this point and it shows in their present work, too often self-indulgent, too little about the books supposedly at hand.

Nonetheless, there are probably more worthwhile review columns appearing in the sf magazines today than at any time in the past. Until recent years we had only Miller's *Analog* column, unique in itself and apparently timeless in duration, and a succession of reviewers in *F&SF*, some of them quite good and at least one of them self-indulgent to the point of sheer inanity. Budrys in *Galaxy* has been with us only a little more than a half-dozen years and del Rey in *If* less than half that time. The critical columns in this magazine and AMAZING STORIES have come and gone through the years, and came back to stay only four years ago. However, during my editorship I have tried to broaden the scope of criticism in this

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magazine beyond the confines of book reviews alone. The reviews continue upon occasion (despite Fritz Leiber's indefinite leave of absence from these pages), but Alexei (and now Cory) Panshin's *SF in Dimension* is an attempt to go beyond specific books to a critical examination of the nature of our literature, while Sprague de Camp's running column on the *Literary Swordsmen & Sorcerers* deals with our roots, the lives and nature of the men who helped create this field.

It seems to me foolhardy to pretend to a broad coverage of the books published; were we to give proper critical space to all those books which deserve review we should swamp the fiction right out of the magazine, leaving a queer beast that was all tail and no body. However, spurred by Greg's letter and other responses we've received from time to time, I am in the process of recasting the nature of our *Fantasy Books* department, hopefully into one of wider value to you, our readers. Stay with us; next issue should begin bearing the fruit of this move.

—Ted White

(Continued from page 104)

It is our own conclusion that mimetic fiction and sf serve separate functions. Mimetic fiction serves a secular purpose. It is a fiction of social integration. Speculative fantasy, on the other hand, is something else, special, useful and uniquely important. Speculative fantasy is a literature of psychic integration.

Here, then, is the something at the heart of sf. Mimetic fiction, dealing in what is changeable, dealing in what has changed beyond recognition in the lifetime of our own parents, dates, fades, loses its pertinence. It is truly ephemeral literature.

Speculative fantasy, on the other hand, dealing in materials, populations and places of its own invention, is far more durable. Its currency is ideas and feelings, that which is debatable and always has been, but also that which is common to all of us. Its end is psychic integration, the maturation of the individual.

Speculative fantasy is a form with unlimited potential. It is an ancient and noble form, squeezed out of its traditional territories by the exploration of the world, by the advent of the Global Village. It has spent these past two hundred years in disrepute and semi-exile while it developed new metaphors on which to build. Those metaphors have now been developed. And just in time, for if anything is needed today, it is a literature of psychic integration.

The adolescence of sf is not past. Expect prodigies.

In succeeding columns, we will pursue these will-of-the-wisps further and pin them down for you. We will examine analogy, symbol and myth in detail, show out of what experiences they arise, how they differ, how they are expressed, and the purposes they each serve. And not least, how they may be seen at work in speculative fantasy, and the consequences for the literature and for us.

Enough for now.

—Alexei & Cory Panshin

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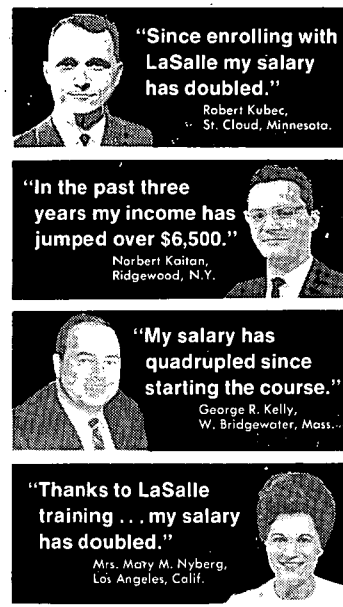
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